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WINTER 1968 VOLUME XXXV, NUMBER 1

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# NOTES

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON** is research professor of psychiatry at Yale and has spent much time in the Far East. His **Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima** was published by Random House on January 29. . . . **DARYL HINE** teaches at Chicago. Atheneum is bringing out a book of his poems, **Minutes**, next fall. . . . **MARK STRAND** teaches English at Mount Holyoke College. . . . **MARTIN DUBERMAN** says that he has become interested in "unstructured" education, which has led him to Black Mountain College (1933-56). He is considering a full-scale history of Black Mountain, or possibly a fictionalized version—a novel or play. . . . **LEO BERSANI's** essay in this issue is from the book he is writing during his year on a Guggenheim. . . . **ANTHONY BURGESS** lives in London and Sussex, and is now, he says, writing a fugue for orchestra, a novel and a study of Bohemianism, and compiling a dictionary of British slang. He tells us about himself, "I am hirsute and six feet tall and very gloomy. I drink gin." . . . **PETER CAWS** has just finished a stint as a vice-president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and is currently directing Ph.D. studies in Philosophy at the City University of New York. In 1967 he published **Science and the Theory of Value** and this spring will teach aesthetics, he says, "to try and find out if such a discipline really exists." . . . **RICHARD KOSTELANETZ** is a young writer living in New York. Dial is publishing his **Theatre of Mixed Means**, of which this interview is a part, this winter. . . . **THOMAS R. EDWARDS** is living in California this year, working on a new book about poetry and politics. . . . **BETTY FALKENBERG** lives in Germany and writes about the German scene. . . . **ROBERT COLES** is working on Volume Two of **Children of Crisis,** to be subtitled "Migrants, Sharecroppers, and Mountaineers." . . . **REUBEN A. BROWER** was recently elected a Senior Fellow of the Society of Fellows at Harvard. . . . **MAUREEN HOWARD** is a Fellow of the Institute for Independent Studies at Radcliffe and is on a Guggenheim this year. Her latest novel is **Bridgeport Bus**. . . . **LEE BAXANDALL's** translation of Peter Weiss's **Song of the Lusitanian Bogey** opened early in January, and his own rock musical, **Move**, opens in April. He was an editor of **Studies on the Left** until it stopped publication this fall.

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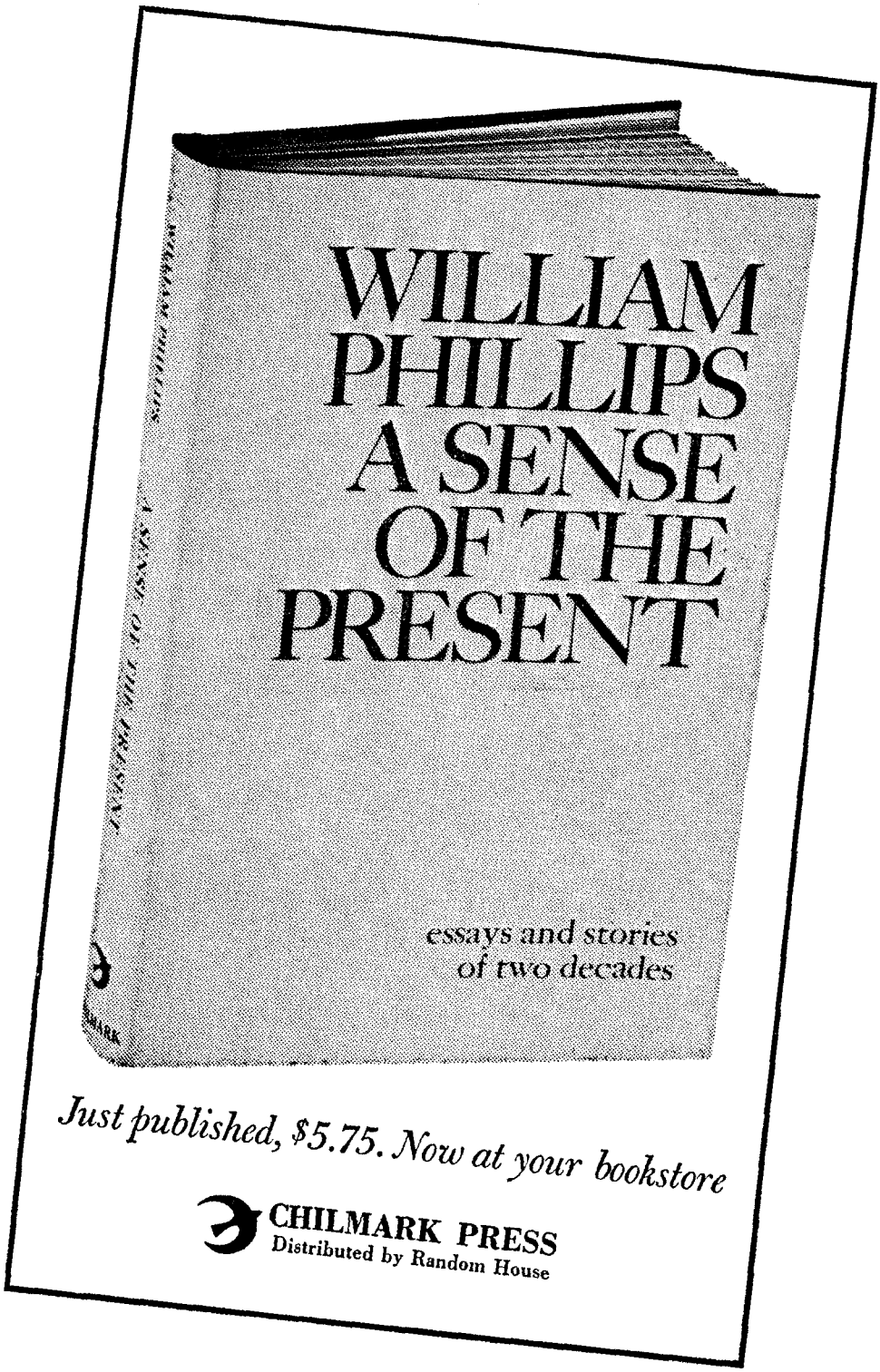


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Robert Jay Lifton

# PROTEAN MAN

I should like to examine a set of psychological patterns characteristic of contemporary life, which are creating a new kind of man — a "protean man." As my stress is upon change and flux, I shall not speak much of "character" and "personality," both of which suggest fixity and permanence. Erikson's concept of identity has been, among other things, an effort to get away from this principle of fixity; and I have been using the term self-process to convey still more specifically the idea of flow. For it is quite possible that even the image of personal identity, in so far as it suggests inner stability and sameness, is derived from a vision of a traditional culture in which man's relationship to his institutions and symbols are still relatively intact — which is hardly the case today. If we understand the self to be the person's symbol of his own organism, then self-process refers to the continuous psychic recreation of that symbol.

I came to this emphasis through work in cultures far removed from my own, studies of young (and not so young) Chinese and Japanese. Observations I was able to make in America also led me to the conviction that a very general process was taking place. I do not mean to suggest that everybody is becoming the same, or that a totally new "world-self" is taking shape. But I am convinced that a new style of self-process is emerging everywhere. It derives from the interplay of three factors responsible for human behavior: the psychobiological potential common to all mankind at any moment in time; those traits given special emphasis in a particular cultural tradition; and those related to modern (and particularly contemporary) historical forces. My thesis is that this third factor plays an increasingly important part in shaping self-process.

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My work with Chinese was done in Hong Kong, in connection with a study of the process of "thought reform" (or "brainwashing") as conducted on the mainland. I found that Chinese intellectuals of varying ages, whatever their experience with thought reform itself, had gone through an extraordinary set of what I at that time called identity fragments — of combinations of belief and emotional involvement — each of which they could readily abandon in favor of another. I remember particularly the profound impression made upon me by the extraordinary history of one young man in particular: beginning as a "filial son" or "young master," that elite status of an only son in an upper-class Chinese family; then feeling himself an abandoned and betrayed victim, as traditional forms collapsed during civil war and general chaos, and his father, for whom he was to long all his life, was separated from him by political and military duties; then a "student activist" in rebellion against the traditional culture in which he had been so recently immersed (as well as against a Nationalist Regime whose abuses he had personally experienced); leading him to Marxism and to strong emotional involvement in the Communist movement; then, because of remaining "imperfections," becoming a participant in a thought reform program for a more complete ideological conversion; but which, in his case, had the opposite effect, alienating him, so he came into conflict with the reformers and fled the country; then, in Hong Kong, struggling to establish himself as an "anti-Communist writer"; after a variety of difficulties, finding solace and meaning in becoming a Protestant convert; and following that, still just thirty, apparently poised for some new internal (and perhaps external) move.

Even more dramatic were the shifts in self-process of a young Japanese whom I interviewed in Tokyo and Kyoto from 1960 to 1962. I shall mention one in particular as an extreme example of this protean pattern, though there were many others who in various ways resembled him. Before the age of twenty-five he had been all of the following: a proper middle-class Japanese boy, brought up in a professional family within a well-established framework of dependency and obligation; then, due to extensive contact with farmers' and fishermen's sons brought about by wartime evacuation, a "country boy" who was to retain what he described as a life-long attraction to the tastes of the common man; then, a fiery young patriot who "hated the Americans" and whose older brother, a kamikaze pilot,

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was saved from death only by the war's end; then a youngster confused in his beliefs after Japan's surrender, but curious about rather than hostile toward American soldiers; soon an eager young exponent of democracy, caught up in the "democracy boom" which swept Japan; at the same time a youthful devotee of traditional Japanese arts — old novels, Chinese poems, kabuki and flower arrangement; during junior high and high school, an all-round leader, outstanding in studies, student self-government and general social and athletic activities; almost simultaneously, an outspoken critic of society at large and of fellow students in particular for their narrow careerism, on the basis of Marxist ideas current in Japanese intellectual circles; yet also an English-speaking student, which meant, in effect, being in still another vanguard and having strong interest in things American; then, midway through high school, experiencing what he called a "kind of neurosis" in which he lost interest in everything he was doing and, in quest of a "change in mood," took advantage of an opportunity to become an exchange student for one year at an American high school; became a convert to many aspects of American life, including actually being baptized as a Christian under the influence of a minister he admired who was also his American "father," and returned to Japan only reluctantly; as a "returnee," found himself in many ways at odds with his friends and was accused by one of "smelling like butter" (a traditional Japanese phrase for Westerners); therefore reimmersed himself in "Japanese" experience — sitting on *tatami,* indulging in quiet, melancholy moods, drinking tea and so on; then became a *ronin* — in feudal days, a samurai without a master, now a student without a university — because of failing his examinations for Tokyo University (a sort of Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Berkeley rolled into one), and as is the custom, spending the following year preparing for the next round rather than attend a lesser institution; once admitted, found little to interest him until becoming an enthusiastic *Zengakuren* activist, with full embrace of its ideal of "pure Communism" and a profound sense of fulfillment in taking part in the planning and carrying out of student demonstrations; but when offered a high position in the organization during his junior year, abruptly became an *ex-Zengakuren* activist by resigning, because he felt he was not suited for "the life of a revolutionary"; then an aimless dissipator, as he drifted into a pattern of heavy drinking, marathon mah-jongg games and affairs with bargirls;

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but when the time came, had no difficulty gaining employment with one of Japan's mammoth industrial organizations (and one of the *bêtes noires* of his Marxist days) and embarking upon the life of a young executive or *sarariman* (salaried man) — in fact doing so with eagerness, careful preparation and relief, but at the same time having fantasies and dreams of kicking over the traces, sometimes violently, and embarking upon a world tour (largely Hollywood-inspired) of exotic and sophisticated pleasure-seeking.

There are, of course, important differences between the protean life styles of the two young men, and between them and their American counterparts — differences which have to do with cultural emphases and which contribute to what is generally called national character. But such is the intensity of the shared aspects of historical experience that contemporary Chinese, Japanese and American self-process turn out to have striking points of convergence.

I would stress two historical developments as having special importance for creating protean man. The first is the world-wide sense of what I have called *historical* (or *psychohistorical*) *dislocation,* the break in the sense of connection which men have long felt with the vital and nourishing symbols of their cultural tradition — symbols revolving around family, idea systems, religions, and the life cycle in general. In our contemporary world one perceives these traditional symbols (as I have suggested elsewhere, using the Japanese as a paradigm) as irrelevant, burdensome or inactivating, and yet one cannot avoid carrying them within or having one's self-process profoundly affected by them. The second large historical tendency is the *flooding of imagery* produced by the extraordinary flow of post-modern cultural influences over mass communication networks. These cross readily over local and national boundaries, and permit each individual to be touched by everything, but at the same time cause him to be overwhelmed by superficial messages and undigested cultural elements, by headlines and by endless partial alternatives in every sphere of life. These alternatives, moreover, are universally and simultaneously shared — if not as courses of action, at least in the form of significant inner imagery.

We know from Greek mythology that Proteus was able to change his shape with relative ease — from wild boar to lion to dragon to fire to flood. But what he did find difficult, and would not do unless

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seized and chained, was to commit himself to a single form, the form most his own, and carry out his function of prophecy. We can say the same of protean man, but we must keep in mind his possibilities as well as his difficulties.

The protean style of self-process, then, is characterized by an interminable series of experiments and explorations — some shallow, some profound — each of which may be readily abandoned in favor of still new psychological quests. The pattern in many ways resembles what Erik Erikson has called "identity diffusion" or "identity confusion," and the impaired psychological functioning which those terms suggest can be very much present. But I would stress that the protean style is by no means pathological as such, and, in fact, may well be one of the functional patterns of our day. It extends to all areas of human experience — to political as well as sexual behavior, to the holding and promulgating of ideas and to the general organization of lives.

I would like to suggest a few illustrations of the protean style, as expressed in America and Europe, drawn both from psychotherapeutic work with patients and from observations on various forms of literature and art.

One patient of mine, a gifted young teacher, spoke of himself in this way:

> I have an extraordinary number of masks I can put on or take off. The question is: is there, or should there be, one face which should be authentic? I'm not sure that there is one for me. I can think of other parallels to this, especially in literature. There are representations of every kind of crime, every kind of sin. For me, there is not a single act I cannot imagine myself committing.

He went on to compare himself to an actor on the stage who "performs with a certain kind of polymorphous versatility" — and here he was referring, slightly mockingly, to Freud's term, "polymorphous perversity," for diffusely inclusive (also protean) infantile sexuality. And he asked:

> Which is the real person, so far as an actor is concerned? Is he more real when performing on the stage — or when he is at home? I tend to think that for people who have these many, many masks, there is no home. Is it a futile gesture for the actor to try to find his real face?

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My patient was by no means a happy man, but neither was he incapacitated. And although we can see the strain with which he carries his "polymorphous versatility," it could also be said that, as a teacher and a thinker, and in some ways as a man, it served him well.

In contemporary American literature, Saul Bellow is notable for the protean men he has created. In *The Adventures of Augie March,* one of his earlier novels, we meet a picaresque hero with a notable talent for adapting himself to divergent social worlds. Augie himself says: "I touched all sides, and nobody knew where I belonged. I had no good idea of that myself." And a perceptive young English critic, Tony Tanner, tells us: "Augie indeed celebrates the self, but he can find nothing to do with it." Tanner goes on to describe Bellow's more recent protean hero, Herzog, as "a representative modern intelligence, swamped with ideas, metaphysics, and values, and surrounded by messy facts. It labours to cope with them all."

A distinguished French literary spokesman for the protean style — in his life and in his work — is, of course, Jean-Paul Sartre. Indeed, I believe that it is precisely because of these protean traits that Sartre strikes us as such an embodiment of twentieth-century man. An American critic, Theodore Solotaroff, speaks of Sartre's fundamental assumption that "there is no such thing as even a relatively fixed sense of self, ego, or identity — rather there is only the subjective mind in motion in relationship to that which it confronts." And Sartre himself refers to human consciousness as "a sheer activity transcending toward objects," and "a great emptiness, a wind blowing toward objects." These might be overstatements, but I doubt that they could have been written thirty years ago. Solotaroff further characterizes Sartre as

> constantly on the go, hurrying from point to point, subject to subject; fiercely intentional, his thought occupies, fills, and distends its material as he endeavors to lose and find himself in his encounters with other lives, disciplines, books, and situations.

This image of repeated, autonomously willed death and rebirth of the self, so central to the protean style, becomes associated with the themes of fatherlessness — as Sartre goes on to tell us in his autobiography with his characteristic tone of serious self-mockery:

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> There is no good father, that's the rule. Don't lay the blame on men but on the bond of paternity, which is rotten. To beget children, nothing better; *to have* them, what iniquity! Had my father lived, he would have lain on me at full length and would have crushed me. . . . Amidst Aeneas and his fellows who carry their Anchises on their backs, I move from shore to shore, alone and hating those invisible begetters who bestraddle their sons all their life long. I left behind me a young man who did not have time to be my father and who could now be my son. Was it a good thing or bad? I don't know. But I readily subscribed to the verdict of an eminent psychoanalyst: I have no Superego.

We note Sartre's image of interchangeability of father and son, of "a young man who did not have time to be my father and who could now be my son" — which, in a literal sense refers to the age at which his father died, but symbolically suggests an extension of the protean style to intimate family relationships. And such reversals indeed become necessary in a rapidly changing world in which the sons must constantly "carry their fathers on their backs," teach them new things which they, as older people, cannot possibly know. The judgment of the absent superego, however, may be misleading, especially if we equate superego with susceptibility to guilt. What has actually disappeared — in Sartre and in protean man in general — is the *classic* superego, the internalization of clearly defined criteria of right and wrong transmitted within a particular culture by parents to their children. Protean man requires freedom from precisely that kind of superego — he requires a symbolic fatherlessness — in order to carry out his explorations. But rather than being free of guilt, we shall see that his guilt takes on a different form from that of his predecessors.

There are many other representations of protean man among contemporary novelists: in the constant internal and external motion of "beat generation" writings, such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*; in the novels of a gifted successor to that generation, J. P. Donleavy, particularly *The Ginger Man*; and of course in the work of European novelists such as Günter Grass, whose *The Tin Drum* is a breathtaking evocation of prewar Polish-German, wartime German and postwar German environments, in which the protagonist combines protean adaptability with a kind of perpetual physical-mental "strike" against any change at all.

In the visual arts, one of the most important postwar move-

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ments has been aptly named "action painting" to convey its stress upon process rather than fixed completion. And a more recent and related movement in sculpture, called Kinetic Art, goes further. According to Jean Tinguely, one of its leading practitioners, "artists are putting themselves in rhythm with their time, in contact with their epic, especially with permanent and perpetual movement." As revolutionary as any style or approach is the stress upon innovation per se which now dominates painting. I have frequently heard artists, themselves considered radical innovators, complain bitterly of the current standards dictating that "innovation is all," and of a turnover in art movements so rapid as to discourage the idea of holding still long enough to develop a particular style.

We also learn much from film stars. Marcello Mastroianni, when asked whether he agreed with *Time* magazine's characterization of him as "the neo-capitalist hero," gave the following answer:

> In many ways, yes. But I don't think I'm any kind of hero, neo–capitalist or otherwise. If anything I am an *anti*-hero or at most a *non*-hero. *Time* said I had the frightened, characteristically 20th–century look, with a spine made of plastic napkin rings. I accepted this — because modern man is that way; and being a product of my time and an artist, I can represent him. If humanity were all one piece, I would be considered a weakling.

Mastroianni accepts his destiny as protean man; he seems to realize that there are certain advantages to having a spine made of plastic napkin rings, or at least that it is an appropriate kind of spine to have these days.

John Cage, the composer, is an extreme exponent of the protean style, both in his music and in his sense of all of us as listeners. He concluded a recent letter to the *Village Voice* with the sentence: "Nowadays, everything happens at once and our souls are conveniently electronic, omniattentive." The comment is McLuhan-like, but what I wish to stress particularly is the idea of omniattention — the sense of contemporary man as having the possibility of "receiving" and "taking in" everything. In attending, as in being, nothing is "off limits."

To be sure, one can observe in contemporary man a tendency which seems to be precisely the opposite of the protean style. I refer to the closing off of identity or constriction of self-process, to a straight–

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and–narrow specialization in psychological as well as in intellectual life, and to reluctance to let in any "extraneous" influences. But I would emphasize that where this kind of constricted or "one–dimensional" self-process exists, it has an essentially reactive and compensatory quality. In this it differs from earlier characterological styles it may seem to resemble (such as the "inner-directed" man described by Riesman, and still earlier patterns in traditional society). For these were direct outgrowths of societies which then existed, and in harmony with those societies, while at the present time a constricted self-process requires continuous "psychological work" to fend off protean influences which are always abroad.

Protean man has a particular relationship to the holding of ideas which has, I believe, great significance for the politics, religion, and general intellectual life of the future. For just as elements of the self can be experimented with and readily altered, so can idea systems and ideologies be embraced, modified, let go of and reembraced, all with a new ease that stands in sharp contrast to the inner struggle we have in the past associated with these shifts. Until relatively recently, no more than one major ideological shift was likely to occur in a lifetime, and that one would be long remembered as a significant individual turning-point accompanied by profound soul-searching and conflict. But today it is not unusual to encounter several such shifts, accomplished relatively painlessly, within a year or even a month; and among many groups, the rarity is a man who has gone through life holding firmly to a single ideological vision.

In one sense, this tendency is related to "the end of ideology" spoken of by Daniel Bell, since protean man is incapable of enduring an unquestioning allegiance to the large ideologies and utopian thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One must be cautious about speaking of the end of anything, however, especially ideology, and one also encounters in protean man what I would call strong ideological hunger. He is starved for ideas and feelings that can give coherence to his world, but here too his taste is toward new combinations. While he is by no means without yearning for the absolute, what he finds most acceptable are images of a more fragmentary nature than those of the ideologies of the past; and these images, although limited and often fleeting, can have great influence upon his psychological life. Thus political and religious movements, as they confront protean man, are likely to experience less difficulty

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convincing him to alter previous convictions than they do providing him a set of beliefs which can command his allegiance for more than a brief experimental interlude.

Intimately bound up with his flux in emotions and beliefs is a profound inner sense of absurdity, which finds expression in a tone of mockery. The sense and the tone are related to a perception of surrounding activities and belief as profoundly strange and inappropriate. They stem from a breakdown in the relationship between inner and outer worlds — that is, in the sense of symbolic integrity — and are part of the pattern of psychohistorical dislocation I mentioned earlier. For if we view man as primarily a symbol-forming organism, we must recognize that he has constant need of a meaningful inner formulation of self and world in which his own actions, and even his impulses, have some kind of "fit" with the "outside" as he perceives it.

The sense of absurdity, of course, has a considerable modern tradition, and has been discussed by such writers as Camus as a function of man's spiritual homelessness and inability to find any meaning in traditional belief systems. But absurdity and mockery have taken much more extreme form in the post-World War II world, and have in fact become a prominent part of a universal life style.

In American life, absurdity and mockery are everywhere. Perhaps their most vivid expression can be found in such areas as Pop Art and the more general burgeoning of "pop culture." Important here is the complex stance of the pop artist toward the objects he depicts. On the one hand he embraces the materials of the everyday world, celebrates and even exalts them — boldly asserting his creative return to representational art (in active rebellion against the previously reigning nonobjective school), and his psychological return to the "real world" of *things*. On the other hand, everything he touches he mocks. "Thingness" is pressed to the point of caricature. He is indeed artistically reborn as he moves freely among the physical and symbolic materials of his environment, but mockery is his birth certificate and his passport. This kind of duality of approach is formalized in the stated "duplicity" of Camp, a poorly-defined aesthetic in which (among other things) all varieties of mockery converge under the guiding influence of the homosexual's subversion of a heterosexual world.

Also relevant are a group of expressions in current slang, some of them derived originally from jazz. The "dry mock" has replaced

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the dry wit; one refers to a segment of life experience as a "bit," "bag," "caper," "game," (or "con game"), "scene," "show" or "scenario"; and one seeks to "make the scene" (or "make it"), "beat the system" or "pull it off" — or else one "cools it" ("plays it cool") or "cops out." The thing to be experienced, in other words, is too absurd to be taken at its face value; one must either keep most of the self aloof from it, or if not one must lubricate the encounter with mockery.

A similar spirit seems to pervade literature and social action alike. What is best termed a "literature of mockery" has come to dominate fiction and other forms of writing on an international scale. Again Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* comes to mind, and is probably the greatest single example of this literature — a work, I believe, which will eventually be appreciated as much as a general evocation of contemporary man as of the particular German experience with Nazism. In this country the divergent group of novelists known as "black humorists" also fit into the general category — related as they are to a trend in the American literary consciousness which R. W. B. Lewis has called a "savagely comical apocalypse" or a "new kind of ironic literary form and disturbing vision, the joining of the dark thread of apocalypse with the nervous detonations of satiric laughter." For it is precisely death itself, and particularly threats of the contemporary apocalypse, that protean man ultimately mocks.

The relationship of mockery to political and social action has been less apparent, but is, I would claim, equally significant. There is more than coincidence in the fact that the largest American student uprising of recent decades, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement of 1965, was followed immediately by a "Dirty Speech Movement." While the object of the Dirty Speech Movement — achieving free expression of forbidden language, particularly of four-letter words — can be viewed as a serious one, the predominant effect, even in the matter of names, was that of a mocking caricature of the movement which preceded it. But if mockery can undermine protest, it can also enliven it. There have been signs of craving for it in major American expressions of protest such as the Negro movement and the opposition to the war in Vietnam. In the former a certain chord can be struck by the comedian Dick Gregory, and in the latter by the use of satirical skits and parodies, that revives the flagging attention of protestors becoming gradually bored with the repetition

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of their "straight" slogans and goals. And on an international scale, I would say that, during the past decade, Russian intellectual life has been enriched by a leavening spirit of mockery — against which the Chinese leaders are now, in the extremes of their "Cultural Revolution," fighting a vigorous but ultimately losing battle.

Closely related to the sense of absurdity and the spirit of mockery is another characteristic of protean man which can be called "suspicion of counterfeit nurturance." Involved here is a severe conflict of dependency, a core problem of protean man. I first began to think of the concept several years ago while working with survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. I found that these survivors both felt themselves in need of special help, and resented whatever help was offered them because they equated it with weakness and inferiority. In considering the matter more generally, I found this equation of nurturance with a threat to autonomy a major theme of contemporary life. The increased dependency needs resulting from the breakdown of traditional institutions lead protean man to seek out replacements wherever he can find them. The large organizations (government, business, academic, etc.) to which he turns, and which contemporary society more and more holds out as a substitute for traditional institutions, present an ambivalent threat to his autonomy in one way; and the intense individual relationships in which he seeks to anchor himself in another. Both are therefore likely to be perceived as counterfeit. But the obverse side of this tendency is an expanding sensitivity to the unauthentic, which may be just beginning to exert its general creative force on man's behalf.

Technology (and technique in general), together with science, have special significance for protean man. Technical achievement of any kind can be strongly embraced to combat inner tendencies toward diffusion, and to transcend feelings of absurdity and conflicts over counterfeit nurturance. The image of science itself, however, as the ultimate power behind technology and, to a considerable extent, behind contemporary thought in general, becomes much more difficult to cope with. Only in certain underdeveloped countries can one find, in relatively pure form, those expectations of scientific-utopian deliverance from all human want and conflict which were characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western thought. Protean man retains much of this utopian imagery, but he finds it increasingly undermined by massive disillusionment. More and more he

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calls forth the other side of the God-devil polarity generally applied to science, and sees it as a purveyor of total destructiveness. This kind of profound ambivalence creates for him the most extreme psychic paradox: the very force he still feels to be his liberator from the heavy burdens of past irrationality also threatens him with absolute annihilation, even extinction. But this paradox may well be — in fact, I believe, already has been — the source of imaginative efforts to achieve new relationships between science and man, and indeed, new visions of science itself.

I suggested before that protean man was not free of guilt. He indeed suffers from it considerably, but often without awareness of what is causing his suffering. For his is a form of hidden guilt: a vague but persistent kind of self-condemnation related to the symbolic disharmonies I have described, a sense of having no outlet for his loyalties and no symbolic structure for his achievements. This is the guilt of social breakdown, and it includes various forms of historical and racial guilt experienced by whole nations and peoples, both by the privileged and the abused. Rather than a clear feeling of evil or sinfulness, it takes the form of a nagging sense of unworthiness all the more troublesome for its lack of clear origin.

Protean man experiences similarly vague constellations of anxiety and resentment. These too have origin in symbolic impairments and are particularly tied-in with suspicion of counterfeit nurturance. Often feeling himself uncared for, even abandoned, protean man responds with diffuse fear and anger. But he can neither find a good cause for the former, nor a consistent target for the latter. He nonetheless cultivates his anger because he finds it more serviceable than anxiety, because there are plenty of targets of one kind or another beckoning, and because even moving targets are better than none. His difficulty is that focused indignation is as hard for him to sustain as is any single identification or conviction.

Involved in all of these patterns is a profound psychic struggle with the idea of change itself. For here too protean man finds himself ambivalent in the extreme. He is profoundly attracted to the idea of making all things, including himself, totally new — to the "mode of transformation." But he is equally drawn to an image of a mythical past of perfect harmony and prescientific wholeness, to the "mode of restoration." Moreover, beneath his transformationism is nostalgia, and beneath his restorationism is his fascinated attraction

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to contemporary forms and symbols. Constantly balancing these elements midst the extraordinarily rapid change surrounding his own life, the nostalgia is pervasive, and can be one of his most explosive and dangerous emotions. This longing for a "Golden Age" of absolute oneness, prior to individual and cultural separation or delineation, not only sets the tone for the restorationism of the politically Rightist antagonists of history: the still-extant Emperor-worshipping assassins in Japan, the Colons in France and the John Birchites and Ku Klux Klanners in this country. It also, in more disguised form, energizes that transformationist totalism of the Left which courts violence, and is even willing to risk nuclear violence, in a similarly elusive quest.

Following upon all that I have said are radical impairments to the symbolism of transition within the life cycle — the *rites de passage* surrounding birth, entry into adulthood, marriage and death. Whatever rites remain seem shallow, inappropriate, fragmentary. Protean man cannot take them seriously, and often seeks to improvise new ones with whatever contemporary materials he has available, including cars and drugs. Perhaps the central impairment here is that of symbolic immortality — of the universal need for imagery of connection predating and extending beyond the individual life span, whether the idiom of this immortality is biological (living on through children and grandchildren), theological (through a life after death), natural (*in* nature itself which outlasts all) or creative (through what man makes and does). I have suggested elsewhere that this sense of immortality is a fundamental component of ordinary psychic life, and that it is now being profoundly threatened: by simple historical velocity, which subverts the idioms (notably the theological) in which it has traditionally been maintained; and, of particular importance to protean man, by the existence of nuclear weapons, which, even without being used, call into question all modes of immortality. (Who can be certain of living on through children and grandchildren, through teachings or kindnesses?)

Protean man is left with two paths to symbolic immortality which he tries to cultivate, sometimes pleasurably and sometimes desperately. One is the natural mode we have mentioned. His attraction to nature and concern at its desecration has to do with an unconscious sense that, in whatever holocaust, at least nature will endure — though such are the dimensions of our present weapons that he cannot be absolutely certain even of this. His second path may be termed that

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of "experiential transcendence" — of seeking a sense of immortality in the way that mystics always have, through psychic experience of such great intensity that time and death are, in effect, eliminated. This, I believe, is the larger meaning of the "drug revolution," of protean man's hunger for chemical aids to "expanded consciousness." And indeed all revolutions may be thought of, at bottom, as innovations in the struggle for immortality, as new combinations of old modes.

We have seen that young adults individually, and youth movements collectively, express most vividly the psychological themes of protean man. And although it is true that these themes make contact with what we sometimes call the "psychology of adolescence," we err badly if we overlook their expression in all age groups and dismiss them as "mere adolescent phenomena." Rather, protean man's affinity for the young — his being metaphorically and psychologically so young in spirit — has to do with his never-ceasing quest for imagery of rebirth. He seeks such imagery from all sources: from ideas, techniques, religious and political systems, mass movements and drugs; or from special individuals of his own kind whom he sees as possessing that problematic gift of his namesake, the gift of prophecy. The dangers inherent in the quest seem hardly to require emphasis. What perhaps needs most to be kept in mind is the general principle that renewal on a large scale is impossible to achieve without forays into danger, destruction and negativity. The principle of "death and rebirth" is as valid psychohistorically as it is mythologically. However misguided many of his forays may be, protean man also carries with him an extraordinary range of possibility for man's betterment, or more important, for his survival.

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# POEMS

## THE NAP

My wristwatch tells me that we've had a little nap.
Perhaps it's stopped meantime? No, it goes,
Ticks and moves its minute hand. Upon my lap
Catullus and *Daniel Deronda* doze.
Dreamer and reader equally, I fear to wake and snap
The thread of their intelligent repose.
The china tea in the cup beside me is quite cold.
Quite cold, the two extremities I hold.

With the precision of assassins the hands of the clock have crept
Stealthily to quarter after two,
In spite of which I am unsure how long we've slept
(For cat and book must both sleep when I do),
Nor can I remember what I was dreaming about, except
That once again I know I dreamt of you,
Ashamed of my furtive affection, thanking the disgrace
Of sleep wherein you have your hiding place.

No less place (to be sure) have you in waking thought,
But there you are less vivid and you share
Their conscious character and over complex plot
With narratives to which you can't compare.
Exquisite structure! your doings are with such meanings fraught
As Reason dreamt of in her *Dictionnaire*.
Awake I try your face and cannot get it clear,
Asleep I see and touch and taste and hear.

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So very near in dreams the naked body, nice
Even when armed, and like a shield, and white;
Dark the pudenda in the midst like a device,
The badge of bliss and blazon of delight.
There Eros practises his plays in paradise
And member-loving Aphrodite might
Be to her Adonis for a second what she seems
In the hall of night and hospital of dreams.

For ought I not to know the signs of the disease
By now: what I don't have and what you are?
And see the diagnosis confirmed as it agrees
With every previous wound and precious scar.
Fever at first is thrilling, it never fails to please,
Only slowly do the symptoms become peculiar.
Illness is idiosyncratic: healthier to ignore
The fact in favour of the metaphor.

Whatever science does the experiment succumbs,
Its tools are deadly, dexterous and deep,
Each local anaesthetic altogether numbs;
I sigh for love's suppository sleep.
Out of dismemberment the unconscious comes
Awake to take its medicine and weep.
The dear physician does the necessary, sings
A measure, pleasure's overture: it stings . . .

Antaeus when once separated from the ground
Relaxed within the grasp of Heracles;
Above the earth he sought his mastery, and found
That he could conquer only on his knees.
As we by the laws of gravity, too, bound
Savour the aftertaste of victories
In which like children caught up and tossed in sport
We for a moment flew without support:

Until the firm familiar arms of fantasy
Turn transparent as the window pane

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And you as one of those perhaps appear to me,
    Impromptu pieces that I rehearse again
With sad darts of wit and wanton apology.
    Suddenly I feel I am in pain.
You go, I wake, Catullus stretches, everything
    Vanishes backwards, love and suffering.

## TERMINAL CONVERSATION

Born to return to every strange new place,
Seeing, as the Buddha says, that you only live once,
I found myself in a great railway station
After midnight. That was late enough for me,
Though anyone who was everyone was there:
Blank terminus or furnished house? For, strange to say,
The waiting room had all the charms of home.

It was winter, the last train had gone.
You will recognize the *mise en scène*
Familiar from too many foreign movies.
Those beside me showed no signs of caring,
And it was plain they thought of going nowhere
At that hour of the night or, already, morning.
They settled down, resident aliens,
To what they appeared to accept as the human condition,
To sleep and not to read, or to discussion
Of the trivia of their uprooted lives
In a language that, although it was not mine,
I found at once that I could understand.

What they were saying in that foreign tongue:

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That emotions should be christened for their object
And not abstractly for their content. Fear and love
Would become 'a dangerous crossing' or just 'you.'
Perhaps, somebody suggested, we should point
And thus avoid misunderstanding and the ills
That generally come from saying what one means.
There was a school of thought in opposition,
Of course — there always is — which said
That the old names were best and meant just what they said.

Nearby some people were discussing nothing.
As far as I recall their conversation,
Some maintained that nothingness was zero
Or at least that they conceived it so,
While certain others insisted that they felt
The absence of sensation as a lack,
A positive negation, so to speak,
Dissatisfaction, disappearance, disillusion
Or even the destruction of the object,
And said that nothing equalled minus one.

All about the furniture stood, dumb,
The most expressive that I ever saw,
It had the grateful look of having been
Rescued from oblivion: those chairs
Had lived in disgrace, underground, for years,
And that inlaid table, too, an exile
Returned from somebody's attic *déclassé*
In company with the out of tune piano
And a distinctly down at heels *duchesse*.

As for the lamps: every one had started
Life as something other than a lamp,
As a typewriter, a trumpet or a doll,
And been converted, willy-nilly lucifer.
Who put them there? What stranded housewife furnished
This most impersonal of places
With the heirlooms of her private fancy,
Or did I dream that they and I were there?

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The station clock was keeping public time
Above our heads. A janitor
Who might have been the janitor of nowhere
Pushed his broom across the mottled pavement
Gathering cigarette ends, newspapers,
The dated detritus of a sleepless night,
Into a canvas bag. I yawned, I yawn
Remembering the meaninglessness now,
The empty hours and uncomfortable faces,
The marble and mysterious conversation,
The out of place old fashioned furniture
And my secret sense that this was, where I was,
A haven however strange however new.

**Daryl Hine**

## THE MARRIAGE

The wind comes from opposite poles,
traveling slowly.

She turns in the deep air.
He walks in the clouds.

She readies herself,
shakes out her hair,

makes up her eyes,
smiles.

The sun warms her teeth,
the tip of her tongue moistens them.

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He brushes the dust from his suit
and straightens his tie.

He smokes.
Soon they will meet.

The wind carries them closer.
They wave.

Closer, closer.
They embrace.

She is making a bed.
He is pulling off his pants.

They marry
and have a child.

The wind carries them off
in different directions.

The wind is strong, he thinks
as he straightens his tie.

I like this wind, she says
as she puts on her dress.

The wind unfolds.
The wind is everything to them.

**Mark Strand**

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Martin Duberman

# BLACK POWER IN AMERICA

The slogan of "Black Power" has caused widespread confusion and alarm. This is partly due to a problem inherent in language: words necessarily reduce complex attitudes or phenomena to symbols which, in their abbreviation, allow for a variety of interpretations. Stuart Chase has reported that in the thirties, when the word "fascism" was on every tongue, he asked 100 people from various walks of life what the word meant and got 100 widely differing definitions. And in 1953 when *The Capital Times* of Madison, Wisconsin, asked 200 people "What is a Communist?" not only was there no agreement, but five out of every eight admitted they couldn't define the term at all. So it is with "Black Power." Its definition depends on whom you ask, when you ask, where you ask, and not least, who does the asking.

Yet the phrase's ambiguity derives not only from the usual confusions of language, but from a failure of clarity (or is it frankness?) on the part of its advocates, and a failure of attention (or is it generosity?) from their critics. The leaders of SNCC and CORE who invented the slogan, including Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick, have given Black Power different definitions on different occasions, in part because their own understanding of the term continues to develop, but in part, too, because their explanations have been tailored to their audiences.[1]

1. Jeremy Larner has recently pointed out ("Initiation for Whitey: Notes on Poverty and Riot," *Dissent,* November-December, 1967) that the young Negro in the ghetto mainly seeks the kind of knowledge which can serve as a "ready-made line, a set of hard-nosed aphorisms," and that both Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael have understood this need. In this

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The confusion has been compounded by the press, which has frequently distorted the words of SNCC and CORE representatives, harping on every connotation of violence and racism, minimizing the central call for ethnic unity.

For all these reasons, it is still not clear whether "Black Power" is to be taken as a short-term tactical device or a long-range goal — that is, a postponement or a rejection of integration; whether it has been adapted as a lever for intimidating whites or organizing blacks, for instilling race hate or race pride; whether it necessitates, permits or encourages violence; whether it is a symptom of Negro despair or of Negro determination, a reaction to the lack of improvement in the daily lives of Negro-Americans or a sign that improved conditions are creating additional expectations and demands. Whether Black Power, furthermore, becomes a constructive psychological and political tactic or a destructive summons to separatism, violence and reverse racism will depend at least as much on developments outside the control of its advocates (like the war in Vietnam) as on their conscious determination. For all these reasons, it is too early for final evaluations; only time, and perhaps not even that, will provide them. At most, certain limited, and tentative, observations are possible.

If Black Power means only that Negroes should organize politically and economically in order to develop self-regard and to exert maximum pressure, then the new philosophy would be difficult to fault, for it would be based on the truism that minorities must argue

regard Larner quotes a speech by Carmichael to the students of Morgan State College, as transcribed in *The Movement,* June, 1967:

> Now then we come to the question of definitions . . . it is very, very important because I believe that people who can define are masters. I want to read a quote. It is one of my favorite quotes. It comes from *Alice In Wonderland,* Lewis Carroll. . . .
>
> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "I mean just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "who is to be master."
>
> That is all. That is all. Understand that . . . the first need of a free people is to define their own terms.

As Larner comments, "Mr. Carmichael, unlike Mr. Carroll, identifies with Humpty Dumpty."

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from positions of strength rather than weakness, that the majority is far more likely to make concessions to power than to justice. To insist that Negro-Americans seek their goals as individuals and solely by appeals to conscience and "love," when white Americans have always relied on group association and organized power to achieve theirs, would be yet one more form of discrimination. Moreover, when whites descry SNCC's declaration that it is tired of turning the other cheek, that henceforth it will actively resist white brutality, they might do well to remember that they have always considered self-defense acceptable behavior for themselves; our textbooks, for example, view the refusal of the revolutionaries of 1776 to "sit supinely by" as the very essence of manhood.

Although Black Power makes good sense when defined to mean further organization and cooperation within the Negro community, the results which are likely to follow in terms of political leverage can easily be exaggerated. The impact is likely to be greatest at the county unit level in the deep South and in the urban ghettos of the North. In this regard, the "Black Panther" party of Lowndes County, Alabama is the prototype.

There are roughly 12,000 Negroes in Lowndes County and 3,000 whites, but until 1964 there was not a single Negro registered to vote, while white registration had reached 118 per cent of those eligible. Negro life in Lowndes, as Andrew Kopkind has graphically recounted[2] was — and is — wretched. The median family income for whites is $4,400, for Negroes, $935; Negro farmhands earn $3.00 to $6.00 a day; half of the Negro women who work are maids in Montgomery (which requires a 40 to 60 mile daily roundtrip) at $4.00 a day; few Negroes have farms, since 90 per cent of the land is owned by about 85 white families; the one large industrial plant in the area, the new Dan River Mills textile factory, will only employ Negroes in menial capacities; most Lowndes Negroes are functional illiterates, living in squalor and hopelessness.

The Black Panther party set out to change all this. The only path to change in Lowndes, and in much of the deep South, is to "take over the courthouse," the seat of local power. For generations

2. "The Lair of the Black Panther," *The New Republic,* August 13, 1966.

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the courthouse in Lowndes has been controlled by the Democratic party; indeed there is no Republican party in the county. Obviously it made little sense for SNCC organizers to hope to influence the local Democracy; no white moderates existed and no discussion of integration was tolerated. To have expected blacks to "bore from within," as Carmichael has said, would have been "like asking the Jews to reform the Nazi party."

Instead, Carmichael and his associates established the separate Black Panther party. After months of work SNCC organizers (with almost no assistance from federal agents) registered enough Negroes to hope for a numerical majority in the county. But in the election of November, 1966, the Black Panther party was defeated, for a variety of reasons which include Negro apathy or fear and white intimidation.[3] Despite this defeat, the possibility of a better life for Lowndes County Negroes does at last exist, and should the Black Panther party come into power at some future point, that possibility could become a reality.

Nonetheless, even on the local level and even in the deep South, Lowndes County is not representative. In Alabama, for example, only eleven of the state's sixty-seven counties have black majorities. Where these majorities do not exist, the only effect independent black political parties are likely to have is to consolidate the whites in opposition. Moreover, and more significantly, many of the basic ills from which Negro-Americans suffer — inadequate housing, inferior education, limited job opportunities — are national phenomena and require national resources to overcome. Whether these resources will be allocated in sufficient amounts will depend, in turn, on whether a national coalition can be formed to exert pressure on the federal government — a coalition of civil rights activists, church groups, campus radicals, New Class technocrats, unskilled, un-unionized laborers and certain elements in organized labor, such as the

3. I have not seen a clear assessment of the causes for defeat. The "Newsletter" from the New York Office of SNCC of November, 1966, makes two points regarding the election: that according to a November report from the Southern Regional Council, 2,823 whites and 2,758 Negroes had registered in Lowndes County, though the white population was approximately 1900; and that "the influential Baptist Alliance told Negroes throughout Alabama to vote the straight Democratic ticket."

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UAW or the United Federation of Teachers. Such a coalition, of course, would necessitate Negro-white unity, a unity Black Power at least temporarily rejects.[4]

The answer that Black Power advocates give to the "coalition argument" is of several pieces. The only kind of progressive coalition which can exist in this country, they say, is the mild, liberal variety which produced the civil rights legislation of recent years. And that kind of legislation has proven itself grossly inadequate. Its chief result has been to lull white liberals into believing that the major battles have been won, whereas in fact there has been almost no change, or change for the worse, in the daily lives of most blacks.[5]

The evidence for this last assertion is persuasive. Despite the Supreme Court decision of 1954, almost 85 per cent of school-age Negroes in the South still sit in segregated classrooms. Unemployment among Negroes has actually gone up in the past ten years. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, with its promising provision for the withdrawal of federal funds in cases of discrimination, has been used in limited fashion in regard to the schools but not at all in regard to other forms of unequal treatment, such as segregated hospital facilities. Under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, only about 40 federal registrars have been sent into the South, though many areas have less than the 50 per cent registration figure which would legally warrant intervention. In short, the legislation produced by the liberal coalition of the early sixties has turned out to be little more than federally approved tokenism, a continuation of paper promises and ancient inequities.

If a *radical* coalition could be formed in this country, that is, one willing to scrutinize in depth the failings of our system, to suggest structural, not piecemeal, reforms, to see them executed with sustained rather than occasional vigor, then Black Power advocates might feel less need to separate themselves and to concentrate on local, marginal successes. But no responsible observer believes that in the foreseeable future a radical coalition on the Left can become the effective political majority in the United States; we will be fortunate

4. On this point, see what to me are the persuasive arguments made by Pat Watters, "The Negroes Enter Southern Politics," *Dissent,* July-August, 1966, and Bayard Rustin, "Black Power and Coalition Politics," *Commentary,* September, 1966.

5. See, on this point, David Danzig, "In Defense of 'Black Power,'" *Commentary,* September, 1966.

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if a radical coalition on the Right does not. And so to SNCC and CORE, talk of further cooperation with white liberals is only an invitation to further futility. It is better, they feel, to concentrate on encouraging Negroes everywhere to self-respect and self-help, and in certain local areas, where their numbers warrant it, to try to win actual political power.

As an adaptation to present realities, Black Power thus has a persuasive logic. But there is such a thing as being too present-minded; by concentrating on immediate prospects, the new doctrine may be jeopardizing larger possibilities for the future, those which could result from a national coalition with white allies. Though SNCC and CORE insist that they are not trying to cut whites out of the movement, that they merely want to redirect white energies into organizing whites so that at some future point a truly meaningful coalition of Negroes and whites can take place, there are grounds for doubting whether they really are interested in a future reconciliation, or if they are, whether some of the overtones of their present stance will allow for it. For example, SNCC's so-called position paper on Black Power attacks white radicals as well as white liberals, speaks vaguely of differing white and black "psyches," and seems to find all contact with all whites contaminating or intimidating ("whites are the ones who must try to raise themselves to our humanistic level").[6]

SNCC's bitterness at the hypocrisy and evasion of the white majority is understandable, yet the refusal to discriminate between degrees of inequity, the penchant instead for wholesale condemnation of all whites, is as unjust as it is self-defeating. The indictments and innuendos of SNCC's "position paper" give some credence to the

6. SNCC's "position paper" was printed in *The New York Times,* August 5, 1966. It is important to point out, however, that SNCC staffers have since denied the official nature of this paper; see for example Elizabeth Sutherland's letter to the editors of *Liberation,* November, 1966, in which she insists that it was "not a S.N.C.C. position paper but a document prepared by a group of workers on one S.N.C.C. project" (she goes on to note that the *Times* refused to print a SNCC letter to this effect). For other denials of the "racist" overtones in "Black Power," see Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want," *The New York Review of Books,* September 22, 1966, and C. E. Wilson, "Black Power and the Myth of Black Racism," *Liberation,* September, 1966. But Andrew Kopkind's report on SNCC staff conferences ("The Future of Black Power," *The New Republic,* January 7, 1967) makes me believe that the dangers of black racism are real and not merely the invention of frightened white liberals (see also James Peck, "Black Racism," *Liberation,* October, 1966).

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view that the line between black power and black racism is a fine one easily erased, that, as always, means and ends tend to get confused, that a tactic of racial solidarity can turn into a goal of racial purity.

The philosophy of Black Power is thus a blend of varied, in part contending, elements, and it cannot be predicted with any certainty which will assume dominance. But a comparison between the Black Power movement and the personnel, programs and fates of earlier radical movements in this country can make some contribution toward understanding its dilemmas and its likely directions.

Any argument based on historical analogy can, of course, become oversimplified and irresponsible. Historical events do not repeat themselves with anything like regularity, for every event is to a large degree embedded in its own special context. An additional danger in reasoning from historical analogy is that in the process we will limit rather than expand our options; by arguing that certain consequences seem always to follow from certain actions and that therefore only a set number of alternatives ever exist, we can prevent ourselves from seeing new possibilities or from utilizing old ones in creative ways. We must be careful, when attempting to predict the future from the past, that in the process we do not straitjacket the present. Bearing these cautions and limitations in mind, some insight can still be gained from a historical perspective. For if there are large variances through time between roughly analogous events, there are also some similarities, and it is these which make comparative study possible and profitable. In regard to Black Power, I think we gain particular insight by comparing it with the two earlier radical movements of Abolitionism and Anarchism.

The Abolitionists represented the left wing of the antislavery movement (a position comparable to the one SNCC and CORE occupy today in the civil rights movement) because they called for an *immediate* end to slavery everywhere in the United States. Most Northerners who disapproved of slavery were not willing to go as far or as fast as the Abolitionists, preferring instead a more ameliorative approach. The tactic which increasingly won the approval of the Northern majority was the doctrine of "nonextension": no further

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expansion of slavery would be allowed, but the institution would be left alone where it already existed. The principle of nonextension first came into prominence in the late eighteen-forties when fear developed in the North that territory acquired from our war with Mexico would be made into new slave states. Later the doctrine formed the basis of the Republican party which in 1860 elected Lincoln to the Presidency. The Abolitionists, in other words, with their demand for immediate (and uncompensated) emancipation, never became the major channel of Northern antislavery sentiment. They always remained a small sect, vilified by slavery's defenders and distrusted even by allies within the antislavery movement.

The parallels between the Abolitionists and the current defenders of Black Power seem to me numerous and striking. It is worth noting, first of all, that neither group started off with so-called "extremist" positions (the appropriateness of that word being, in any case, dubious).[7] The SNCC of 1967 is not the SNCC formed in 1960; both its personnel and its programs have shifted markedly. SNCC originally grew out of the sit-ins spontaneously begun in Greensboro, North Carolina, by four freshmen at the all-Negro North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College. The sit-in technique spread rapidly through the South, and within a few months the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formally inaugurated to channel and encourage further activities. At its inception SNCC's staff was interracial, religious in orientation, committed to the "American Dream," chiefly concerned with winning the right to share more equitably in that Dream and optimistic about the possibility of being allowed to do so. SNCC placed its hopes on an appeal to the national conscience and this it expected to arouse by the examples of nonviolence and redemptive love, and by the dramatic devices of sit-ins, freedom rides and protest marches.[8]

The Abolitionist movement, at the time of its inception, was similarly benign and sanguine. It, too, placed emphasis on "moral

7. For a discussion of "extremism" and the confused uses to which the word can be and has been put, see Howard Zinn, "Abolitionists, Freedom-Riders, and the Tactics of Agitation," *The Antislavery Vanguard*, Martin Duberman, ed., (Princeton, 1965), especially pp. 421-426.

8. For the shifting nature of SNCC see Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston, 1964), and Gene Roberts, "From 'Freedom High' to 'Black Power,'" *The New York Times*, September 25, 1966.

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suasion," believing that the first order of business was to bring the iniquity of slavery to the country's attention, to arouse the average American's conscience. Once this was done, the Abolitionists felt, discussion then could, and would, begin on the particular ways and means best calculated to bring about rapid, orderly emancipation. Some of those Abolitionists who later became intransigent defenders of immediatism — including William Lloyd Garrison — were willing, early in their careers, to consider plans for preliminary apprenticeship. They were willing, in other words, to settle for gradual emancipation *immediately begun* instead of demanding that freedom itself be instantly achieved.

But this early flexibility received little encouragement. The appeal to conscience and the willingness to engage in debate over means alike brought meager results. In the North the Abolitionists encountered massive apathy, in the South massive resistance. Thus thwarted, and influenced as well by the discouraging British experiment with gradualism in the West Indies, the Abolitionists abandoned their earlier willingness to consider a variety of plans for prior education and training, and shifted to the position that emancipation had to take place at once and without compensation to the slaveholder. They also began (especially in New England) to advocate such doctrines as "Dis-Union" and "No-Government," positions which directly parallel Black Power's recent advocacy of "separation" and "de-centralization," and which then as now produced discord and division within the movement, anger and denunciation without.

But the parallel of paramount importance I wish to draw between the two movements is their similar passage from "moderation" to "extremism." In both cases, there *was* a passage, a shift in attitude and program, and it is essential that this be recognized, for it demonstrates the developmental nature of these — of all — movements for social change. Or, to reduce the point to individuals (and to clichés): "revolutionaries are not born but made." Garrison didn't start his career with the doctrine of "immediatism"; as a young man, he even had kind words for the American Colonization Society, a group devoted to deporting Negroes to Africa and Central America. And Stokely Carmichael did not begin his ideological voyage with the slogan of Black Power; as a teen-ager he was opposed to student sit-ins in the South. What makes a man shift from "reform" to

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"revolution" is, it seems to me, primarily to be explained by the intransigence or indifference of his society: either society refuses reforms or gives them in the form of tokens. Thus, *if* one views the Garrisons and Carmichaels as "extremists," one should at least place the blame for that extremism where it belongs — not on their individual temperaments, their genetic predispositions, but on a society which scorned or toyed with their initial pleas for justice.

In turning to the Anarchist movement, I think we can see between it and the new turn taken by SNCC and CORE (or, more comprehensively still, by much of the New Left) significant affinities of style and thought. These are largely unconscious and unexplored; I have seen almost no overt references to them either in the movement's official literature or in its unofficial pronouncements. Yet the affinities seem to me important.

But first I should make clear that in speaking of "Anarchism" as if it were a unified tradition, I am necessarily oversimplifying. The Anarchist movement contained a variety of contending factions, disparate personalities and differing national patterns. Some Anarchists believed in terrorism, others insisted upon nonviolence; some aimed for a communal life based on trade union "syndicates," others refused to bind the individual by organizational ties of any kind; some wished to retain private ownership of property, others demanded its collectivization.[9]

Despite these differing perspectives, all Anarchists did share one major premise: a distrust of authority, the rejection of all forms of rule by man over man, especially that embodied in the State, but also that exemplified by parent, teacher, lawyer, priest. They justified their opposition in the name of the individual; the Anarchists wished each man to develop his "specialness" without the inhibiting interference imposed by authority, be it political or economic, moral or intellectual. This does not mean that the Anarchists sanctioned

9. In recent years several excellent histories and anthologies of Anarchism have been published: George Woodcock's brilliant *Anarchism* (New York, 1962), James Joll's *The Anarchists* (London, 1964), Irving L. Horowitz's anthology *The Anarchists* (New York, 1964) which concentrates on the "classics" of the literature, and Leonard Krimerman and Lewis Perry's collection, *Patterns of Anarchy* (New York, 1966), which presents a less familiar and more variegated selection of Anarchist writings.

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the idea of "each against all." On the contrary, they believed that man was a social creature — that is, that he needed the affection and assistance of his fellows — and most Anarchist versions of the good life (Max Stirner would be the major exception) involved the idea of community. The Anarchists insisted, moreover, that it was not their vision of the future, but rather society as presently constructed, which represented chaos; with privilege the lot of the few and misery the lot of the many, society was currently the essence of *dis*order. The Anarchists demanded a system which would substitute mutual aid for mutual exploitation, voluntarism for force, individual decision-making for centralized dictation.

All of these emphases find echo today in SNCC and CORE. The echoes are not perfect: "Black Power," after all, is above all a call to organization, and its acceptance of politics (and therefore of "governing") would offend a true Anarchist — as would such collectivist terms as "black psyche" or "black personality." Nonetheless, the affinities of SNCC and CORE with the Anarchist position are substantial.

There is, first of all, the same belief in the possibilities of "community" and the same insistence that community be the product of voluntary association. This in turn reflects a second and still more basic affinity: the distrust of centralized authority. SNCC and CORE's energies, and also those of other New Left groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), are increasingly channeled into local, community organizing. On this level, it is felt, "participatory" democracy, as opposed to the authoritarianism of "representative" democracy, becomes possible. And in the Black Panther party, where the poor and disinherited do take a direct role in decision-making, theory has become reality (as it has, on the economic side, in the Mississippi–based "Poor People's Corporation," which to date has formed some fifteen cooperatives).[10]

Then, too, SNCC and CORE, like the Anarchists, talk increasingly of the supreme importance of the individual. They do so, paradoxically, in a rhetoric strongly reminiscent of that long associated with the Right. It could be Herbert Hoover (or Booker T. Washington), but in fact it is Rap Brown who now reiterates the Negro's need

10. See Art Goldberg, "Negro Self-Help," *The New Republic,* June 10, 1967, and Abbie Hoffman, "Liberty House / Poor People's Corporation," *Liberation,* April, 1967.

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to stand on his own two feet, to make his own decisions, to develop self-reliance and a sense of self-worth.[11] SNCC may be scornful of present-day liberals and "statism," but it seems hardly to realize that the laissez faire rhetoric it prefers, derives almost verbatim from the classic liberalism of John Stuart Mill.

A final, more intangible affinity between Anarchism and the entire New Left, including the advocates of Black Power, is in the area of personal style. Both hold up similar values for highest praise and emulation: simplicity, spontaneity, "naturalness" and "primitivism." Both reject modes of dress, music, personal relations, even of intoxication, which might be associated with the dominant middle-class culture. Both, finally, tend to link the basic virtues with "the people," and especially with the poor, the downtrodden, the alienated. It is this *lumpenproletariat* — long kept outside the "system" and thus uncorrupted by its values — who are looked to as a repository of virtue, an example of a better way. The New Left, even while demanding that the lot of the underclasses be improved, implicitly venerates that lot; the desire to cure poverty cohabits with the wish to emulate it.

The Anarchist movement in the United States never made much headway. A few individuals — Benjamin Tucker, Adin Ballou, Lysander Spooner, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Emma Goldman, Josiah Warren — are still faintly remembered, but more for the style of their lives than for any impact on their society.[12] It is not difficult to see what prevented them from attracting a large following. Their very distaste for organization and power precluded the traditional

11. For more detailed discussions of the way in which the rhetoric of the New Left and the traditional Right have begun to merge, see Ronald Hamowy, "Left and Right Meet," *The New Republic*, March 12, 1966; Martin Duberman, "Anarchism Left and Right," *Partisan Review*, Fall, 1966; Paul Feldman, "The Pathos of 'Black Power,'" *Dissent*, Jan.-Feb., 1967; and Carl Oglesby and Richard Schaull, *Containment and Change* (Macmillan: 1967). In the latter Oglesby (p. 167) seems actually to call for a merger between the two groups, arguing that both are "in the grain of American humanist individualism and voluntaristic associational action." He confuses, it seems to me, a similarity of rhetoric and of means with a similarity of goals.

12. The only over-all study of American Anarchism is Eunice M. Schuster, *Native American Anarchism*, (Northampton: 1932). But some useful biographies exist of individual figures in the movement; see especially, Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago: 1961).

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modes for exerting influence. More important still, their philosophy ran directly counter to the national hierarchy of values, a system of beliefs, conscious and otherwise, which has always impeded the drive for rapid change in this country. And it is a system which constitutes a roadblock at least as formidable today as at any previous point in our history.

This value structure stresses, first of all, the prime virtue of "accumulation," chiefly of goods, but also of power and prestige. Any group — be it Anarchists or New Leftists — which challenges the soundness of that goal, which suggests that it interferes with the more important pursuits of self-realization and human fellowship, presents so basic a threat to our national and individual identities as to invite almost automatic rejection.

A second obstacle that our value structure places in the path of radical change is its insistence on the benevolence of history. To the average American, human history is the story of automatic progress. Every day in every way we have got better and better. *Ergo,* there is no need for a frontal assault on our ills; time alone will be sufficient to cure them. Thus it is that many whites today consider the "Negro Problem" solved by the recent passage of civil rights legislation. They choose to ignore the fact that the daily lives of most Negroes have changed but slightly — or, as in the case of unemployment, for the worse. They ignore, too, the group of hard-core problems which have only recently emerged: maldistribution of income, urban slums, disparities in education and training, the breakdown of family structure in the ghetto, technological unemployment — problems which show no signs of yielding to time, but which will require concentrated energy and resources for solution.

Without a massive assault on these basic ills, ours will continue to be a society where the gap between rich and poor widens, where the major rewards go to the few (who are not to be confused with the best). Yet it seems highly unlikely, as of 1968, that the public pressure needed for such an assault will be forthcoming. Most Americans still prefer to believe that ours is either already the best of all possible worlds or will shortly, and without any special effort, become such. It is this deep-seated smugness, this intractable optimism, which must be reckoned with — which indeed will almost certainly destroy — any call for substantive change.

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A further obstacle facing the New Left today, Black Power advocates and otherwise, is that its Anarchist style and mood run directly counter to prevailing tendencies in our national life, especially the tendencies to conformity and centralization. The conformity has been commented on too often to bear repetition, except to point out that the young radicals' unorthodox mores (sexual, social, cultural), are in themselves enough to produce uneasiness and anger in the average American. In insisting on the right of the individual to please himself and to rely on his own judgment (whether in dress, speech, music, sex or stimulants), SNCC and SDS may be solidly within the American tradition — indeed may be its main stream — but this tradition is now more central to our rhetoric than to our behavior.

The Anarchist focus in SNCC and SDS on decentralization, on participatory democracy and on community organizing, likewise runs counter to dominant national trends. Consolidation, not dispersion, is currently king. There are some signs that a counter-development has begun — such as the pending decentralization of the New York City school system — but as yet the overwhelming pattern continues to be consolidation. Both big government and big business are getting bigger and, more ominous still, are coming into ever closer partnership. As Richard J. Barber has recently documented, the federal government is not only failing to block the growth of huge "conglomerate" firms by antitrust action, but it is contributing to that growth through procurement contracts and the exchange of personnel.[13] The traditional hostility between business and government has rapidly drawn to a close. Washington is no longer interested in restraining the giant corporations, and the corporations have lost much of their fear of federal intentions. The two, in happy tandem, are moving the country still further along the road to oligopoly, militarism, economic imperialism and greater privileges for the already privileged. The trend is so pronounced, and there is so little effective opposition to it, that it begins to take on an irrevocable, even irreversible, quality.

In the face of these monoliths of national power, Black Power in Lowndes County is pathetic by comparison. Yet while the formation of the Black Panther party in Lowndes brought out paroxysms of

13. Richard J. Barber, "The New Partnership: Big Government and Big Business," *The New Republic,* Aug. 13, 1966. But see, too, Alexander Bickel's article in the same journal for May 20, 1967.

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fear in the nation at large, the announcement that General Motors' 1965 sales totaled 21 billion dollars — exceeding the GNP of all but nine countries in the world — produced barely a tremor of apprehension. The unspoken assumption can only be something like this: It is less dangerous for a few whites to control the whole nation than for a local majority of Negroes to control their own community. The Kafkaesque dimension of life in America continues to grow.

Black Power is both a product of our society and a repudiation of it. Confronted with the continuing indifference of the majority of whites to the Negro's plight, SNCC and CORE have lost faith in conscience and time, and have shifted to a position which the white majority finds infuriating. The nation as a whole — as in the case of the Abolitionists over a hundred years ago — has created the climate in which earlier tactics no longer seem relevant, in which new directions become mandatory if frustration is to be met and hope maintained. And if the new turn proves a wrong one, if Black Power forecloses rather than animates further debate on the Negro's condition, if it destroys previous alliances without opening up promising new options, it is the nation as a whole that must bear the responsibility. There seems little likelihood that the American majority will admit to that responsibility. Let us at least hope it will not fail to recognize the rage which Black Power represents, to hear the message at the movement's core:

> *Sweethearts, the script has changed . . .*
> *And with it the stage directions which advise*
> *Lowered voices, genteel asides,*
> *And the white hand slowly turning the dark page.*[14]

14. Kay Boyle, "On Black Power," *Liberation*, January, 1967.

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# THE ANXIOUS IMAGINATION

Only when language loses its meaning does it achieve the status of literature. This enigmatic but by now familiar remark of Gérard Genette's about Flaubert is, among other things, a way of proclaiming the irrelevance to literature of psychological content and, on the part of criticism, of psychological analysis. In an essay printed in *PR* (Summer, 1966), Nathalie Sarraute strongly rejected this approach both to literature and to Flaubert, offering *Madame Bovary* as "proof that what is important in writing is the unearthing, or re-creation of a new psychic substance. . . ." Curiously enough, Mme. Sarraute's affirmation strikes me as a fine starting point for something like a justification of Genette. For the dramatization of certain "expanded" or hyperbolic states of consciousness, of moments when the stimulated mind is "producing" in excess of what can be accounted for by its environment or even by its past, exposes — or proposes — what might be called the anxiously autonomous imagination. The uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and literature can perhaps be explained by the fact that literature doesn't simply compensate for those anxieties from which psychoanalysis would relieve us by making them intelligible, but perhaps thrives on exploiting an essential imbalance between the self and the world. Psychoanalysis is the clinical version of realism: its aim is to adjust consciousness to the world. But realism may be the pathology of literature since, as the example of Flaubert shows, it attempts to deny the exuberantly irrelevant, arbitrary and even insignificant richness of imagination. In the history of the novel, Flaubert is perhaps the most subtly clinical observer of the "disease" of imagination. It's therefore not surprising that his work is almost a handbook of ana-

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lyzable "symptoms" and at the same time a demonstration of the fact that to interpret symptoms is simply (and extraordinarily) to multiply fictions.

The most curious and extreme example in Flaubert of this psychoanalytic fiction *avant la lettre* is *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier,* where Flaubert traces the biography of a sadist whose saintly self-immolation is the punishment he inflicts upon himself for his murderous fantasies. Raised by parents who think of him as "marked by God" and who "gave him infinite respect and attention," Julien displays both a mildness which makes his mother think he will become an archbishop, and a breathless interest in warriors' tales of "the prodigious wounds" inflicted in the battles of their youth which leads his father to see in him a future conqueror. But one day in church this spoiled and deceptively submissive boy sees a white mouse whose reappearance on subsequent Sundays fascinates, troubles and "importunes" him. "Taken with hatred" for the mouse, he "resolved to get rid of it," and, having killed it with a stick, he begins his career of fantastic slaughter. He becomes a hunter in order to satisfy his thirst for blood, and with a supernatural power which objectifies the insatiable nature of his urge to destroy, he kills with exhilaration an incredible number of animals until one day a great stag, before dying from an arrow Julien has shot into his head, curses him and predicts he will murder his mother and father.

Horrified, Julien gives up hunting, leaves home, becomes a famous warrior and marries an emperor's daughter who, when he tells her of his fears, ridicules his superstitions and encourages him to take up hunting again. When he does, the animals he shoots at mysteriously resist his attacks, surround and follow him ominously (with their "cunning looks, . . . they seemed to be meditating a plan of revenge.") Terrified and exasperated, Julien pounces on some red partridges who inexplicably disappear under the cape he hopes to smother them with. "His thirst for slaughter came back; since there was a lack of animals, he would have liked to massacre men." The occasion at once presents itself. His parents, who, after years of searching for their son, have arrived at his castle, are put up for the night by Julien's wife in the younger couple's bedroom. There Julien, mistaking them for his wife and a lover, savagely kills them. He then leaves his wife and his land, asking her only "to pray for his soul, since

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from now on he no longer existed." He begs, wears "a hair-shirt with iron points," seeks death in all sorts of perilous adventures, finally decides to live in order to serve others and dies one night in the embrace of a horrible leper (kissing his blueish, foul-smelling mouth and pressed, naked, against his cold, scabby body in order to give him some of his own warmth.) The leper, suddenly transfigured, reveals himself as Christ and, as a reward for Julien's absolute charity, carries him triumphantly up to heaven.

The story skillfully blends psychological and supernatural detail. Flaubert presents his tale as an exercise in hagiography: "And that," he writes at the end, "is the story of saint Julien the Hospitaler, almost as one finds it on the stained-glass window of a church in my country." The narrator's matter-of-factness throughout the story indeed suggests an attempt merely to transcribe the different scenes of Saint Julien's life as they might be represented in the stained-glass panels of that church window. And, except for an occasionally false note, when the narrator's indulgent, sophisticated restraint is a bit too obvious (as when, speaking of Julien's pious mother, he writes: "By dint of praying to God, a son came to her"), the unemphatically literal rendering of the legend, the lack of analytical comment, do help to make Julien's extraordinary fate seem almost natural. But a similarly matter-of-fact account of Julien's upbringing and of the progress of his sadistic impulses provides precisely the commentary which Flaubert refrains from giving explicitly. A more transparently reductive analysis might have undone the legend by simply translating it back into the more probable history (or secret fantasies) which it transforms but also exposes. And so the advantage of this method would seem to be that instead of a speculative commentary appended to or inserted in a supernatural tale, we have an internal analysis provided by the tale itself which indirectly suggests the metaphorical status of the events being recorded.

But having chosen to imitate rather than explicate the pictorial version of the legend, Flaubert gives us much more than a psychological reading of the miracles. The supernatural is no more imaginary than the natural; or rather, both pathology and hagiography come to have the same inventive distinction because the literal rendering of both makes them equally historical and equally fictive. There is no "reality" which the legend both makes sacred and obscures. While

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Julien the saint appears to be a pious sublimation of Julien the self-punishing murderer, both sainthood and sadism could be thought of as creative fantasies equally capable of producing events. That is, they are both versions of the same fable, and both add something substantial to history: on the one hand, the murder of Julien's parents, on the other, the veneration of Julien the saint. In a sense, then, remarkable as Flaubert's "case study" is, he goes beyond his own psychological sophistication into an implicit equalization and critique of *all* fictions. There is no need to question the events of Julien's life since no representation of reality has priority over any other representation. Psychology is as interpretive as hagiography, which is to say that while they both may be metaphorical, neither one is more "original" than the other. Thus the natural and the supernatural can be treated almost as different aesthetic tastes in an unremittingly literal narrative.

*Madame Bovary* provides us with a more extensive illustration of a psychological portrait which becomes a critique of analytical procedures themselves, and this by virtue of the fact that the psychological "mistake" being studied consists of an effort to equate reality with its representations. Psychology is, of course, pitched at a much lower key in *Madame Bovary* than in the Saint's legend; with Emma, Flaubert's psychological originality shows itself not in anything as sensational as Julien's sadism, but in a deceptively modest portrait of the pathology of boredom. I'm thinking especially of chapters in the first half of the novel, before Emma's affair with Rodolphe, when it is precisely the fact that nothing happens which creates in Emma a kind of permanent floating anxiety. Now the importance of this as a subject for literature is not merely in the new areas of psychological exploration which it opens, but, perhaps more profoundly, in the indifference it implies to the traditionally *explanatory* function of literary fictions. Romantic anguish may be incurable, but it is generally not unintelligible; there is a "sufficient cause" for the suffering of Werther, René, Oberman, Ruy Blas and Chatterton, and the rhetorical effort of romantic writers (especially in France) is aimed less at the description of a specific state of mind than at a "justification" of extreme states by a strenuous appeal to historical, psychological or metaphysical causes. Romantic despair is, as a result, dignified and can even be optimistic. Behind those majestic poses lies

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the sense of a universe somehow adequate to a noble (if suicidal) consciousness of it. The hero may be aware only of futility, but even the futile and the meaningless become tragic, that is, richly stimulating facts about the world for Oberman and René. If, say, Hugo and Vigny often seem didactic, it's because they think of the poet's anguish not as an inexplicable fact of consciousness, but as an historical circumstance which an enlightened society could change by heeding its prophets. And even in the most radical irrationalists of French literature — think of the ambitions of Nerval, Rimbaud and Breton — the world of dreams can, in a sense, be salvaged; it is as if there were no mental experience which is by nature absolutely impermeable to any kind of intelligible discourse. Only in writers we have begun to listen to rather recently — most notably, Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot — do we find in French what might be called an insistent allusiveness to something more extreme than irrationality, to a mode of being which, unlike the irrational, is inaccessible to reason and which literature may take as the invisible subject it attempts *not* to express.

The neutral, impersonal language which Blanchot dreams of would not be psychologically descriptive; ideally it would be entirely devoid of any particular personality. But perhaps the origins of such startling ambitions lie in self-dramatizations so hyperbolic that they tend to abstract personality from its environment and make imagination appear autonomous. Literature's apparent function of making life intelligible perhaps begins to be subverted as soon as it takes for a subject an agitation neither adequately projected on the world nor adequately accounted for by the world. There is already something of this in the *Lui* of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau,* which is perhaps why that work strikes us as more modern than the swarm of romantic books it seems both to announce and to mock. The *Lui*'s manic restlessness, for all his brilliance, is comical and disturbingly trivial, but that is his originality. The character is interesting not for the reasons he behaves as he does (his laziness, deliberate hypocrisy, self-disgust, failure as a composer), but for the essentially absurd inventiveness which his idleness makes possible. For the reasons are inadequate to the range of invention, as indeed the setting (the terrace of the Café de la Régence) seems inappropriate to the performance. The contrast between this extraordinarily turned-on or ex-

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panded consciousness and the poverty of the occasion as well as of the character's life makes him both ridiculous and irreducibly mysterious. The comedy is crucial, and Diderot is suggesting the absorbing insignificance of a mind idly exploring its own limits. Some of Musset's heroes strike a similar note; although they tend to reflect on absurdity in "serious" metaphysical terms, in their freest moments their speech may be simply garbled. In *Les Caprices de Marianne*, for example, vaguely philosophical talk about reality as a "shadow" is far less interesting than the inarticulate, undignified and "empty" irritability which Octave displays after his scenes with Marianne (when he complains of the bells grating on his nerves, or when only a silly "Drig! drig!" or "Tra, tra, poum! poum!" can express the disarray of a totally disinterested, unattached mind which Marianne has temporarily set afloat again, has dislodged from the comparative security of debauchery).

There are of course immense differences among all these treatments of unspecified or extreme mental states. The exuberant activity of Diderot's *neveu*, for example, is a far cry from the poet's leaden melancholy in those pieces of *Les Fleurs du mal* where Baudelaire describes, if not similar feelings, at least a similar relationship between a kind of existential intensity and the conditions — internal or external — which might make it intelligible. The resemblance lies in a certain indifference to possible correlations between modes of being and what can be *known* about the self and the world. And, as we shall see more clearly in *Madame Bovary*, that indifference both changes the psychological content of literature (by undoing the notion of coherent character) and makes literature less dependent on psychology (since the imagination can apparently invent in extravagant excess of what environment or a personal past can provide). An overcast day in Paris sets off the fantastic depression of a famous "Spleen" poem:

> *Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle*
> *Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,*
> *Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle*
> *Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits;*
>
> *Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,*
> *Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,*
> *S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide*
> *Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris;*

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*Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées*
*D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,*
*Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées*
*Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,*

*Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie*
*Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,*
*Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie*
*Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrément.*

*—Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique,*
*Défilent lentement dans mon âme; l'Espoir,*
*Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique,*
*Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir.*

The anguished terror Baudelaire describes is, in the poem, less interesting psychologically than rhetorically, although it may be just the inflated rhetoric which at first puts us off. There is nothing more to "understand" about the depression than the ways in which it lends itself to exaggeration, to the outrageously theatrical. To *explain* this type of anxiety, we would have to explain Baudelaire, who, in a sense, is not the subject of the poem. He *is* the subject of the life Sartre analyzes or of the dream Michel Butor studies (which of course doesn't mean that they, or any biographer, describe their subject accurately), but in the poem the only autobiographical element is a day of bad weather. And, inasmuch as we can speak of "realistic" poetry, Hugo's "*Tristesse d'Olympio*" and Lamartine's "*Isolement*" are much more realistic than the "*Spleen*" piece in that they make melancholy intelligible in plausibly biographical terms (and it wouldn't matter if the biography were invented.) The artificiality of Baudelaire's poetry, on the other hand, has less to do with his interest in the drugs evoked in the *Paradis artificiels* than with the deliberate severance of the poetic state from any plausible history. Indeed, the fabulous past conjured up in so many poems of *Les Fleurs du mal* simply emphasizes this break with the past, since it redefines memory as the sport rather than the source of imagination.

The tone of "*Quand le ciel bas et lourd . . .*" is melodramatic but somehow not serious. While we could hardly call the poem comical, its solemnity seems to me implicitly mocked by the poet's overindulgence in devices used to create an atmosphere excessively solemn. Allegory in Baudelaire, curiously enough, serves the same function as

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his use of prosaic language: while they often work in opposite directions in a single poem (the one deflating what the other inflates), they both violently upset that naturalistic seriousness which romantic eloquence was very rarely willing to forego. Eliot recognized something artificial in Baudelaire's suffering and he spoke of Baudelaire's confusion of evil with its theatrical representations, the "theater" being the "Byronic paternity and Satanic fraternity" behind many of his poems. But this paraphernalia is, for Eliot, "redeemed by *meaning something else*"; Baudelaire has, finally, a "fundamental sincerity" which Eliot defines as his concern "with the real problem of good and evil." Understandably, Eliot preferred the man to the poet; it's easier for him to admire Baudelaire's remark that civilization consists in "the diminution of the traces of original sin" than to find anything in his poetry that expresses such a message in unambiguously sincere — and poetically successful — terms. For evil and suffering in Baudelaire's poems may *not* be serious, although the moral duplicities which Sartre finds (rightly, I think) more characteristic of Baudelaire's life than the sincerity Eliot praised is perhaps the source of Baudelaire's strength as a poet. We might even say that in *Les Fleurs du mal,* a certain frivolity is perhaps the most serious Baudelairean note. On the one hand, unauthenticity can perhaps be considered as an aesthetic category as well as an ethical one; and in that case it may mean nothing more than a refusal to impose certain forms of censorship (deriving, say, from notions of psychological probability or of taste) on verbal play. But while Baudelaire pulls out all the stops in letting his melodramatic imagination transform internal and external reality into a single allegorical scene (by the third stanza the poet no longer perceives any difference between his mind and the world), he also manages to suggest some detachment from the often tasteless artifices (Hope knocking its head against rotten ceilings, Anguish pounding its flag into his head) which melodramatize his despair. We are encouraged to see some self-mockery in these excesses by the sophisticated, highly controlled contexts in which they occur. The elaborate single-sentence structure of the first four stanzas of the poem quoted, designed to get the maximum shock-effect from the contrast between the silence or near-silence of stanzas 1-3 and the sudden, nerve-shattering clanging of bells in line 13, precludes any sense of the macabre as a "natural" expression of feeling. That

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is, Baudelaire's loudly advertised indifference to illusions of spontaneity or of nature provides the surest index to his special kind of "seriousness": his continuous emphasis on the richly theatrical possibilities of art.

Thus, in the marvelous "*Spleen*" poem beginning "*J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans,*" the combination of weighty abstraction ("*L'ennui, fruit de la morne curiosité, / Prend les proportions de l'immortalité*") and of a trivial concreteness ("*Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées*") emphasizes the virtuosity with which the poet plays with a paralyzing past rather than the sphynxlike inertia which is the apparent subject of the poem. He is self–consciously juxtaposing the most incongruous images to describe himself (a piece of furniture, a cemetery, a boudoir, a pyramid), and the casual solemnity with which he does this creates the poem's elusive tone. Its richness comes from an unstable mixture of light and heavy elements, from a refusal to settle on any one tone, to take this bizarrely heterogeneous self seriously, *or* to deny the "*ennui*" and the "*humeur farouche*" which the poem describes. A thematic analysis of images in *Les Fleurs du mal* could construct that problematic "self" we find in contemporary French criticism: neither a biographical Baudelaire nor the Baudelaire of specific artistic achievements, but rather the coherent psychological skeleton "under" his work. But what strikes me as far more interesting in his best poems is the way he makes such structures irrelevant. His melodramatic self-exposures are really leisurely self-inventions, and Baudelaire's tone invites us to consider those inventions as the self-conscious defiance of the psychology they presumably express. He is free *because* he is so hopelessly oppressed; the enigma of *ennui* inspires the *feux d'artifice* which Baudelaire ironically offers as autobiography. And this is the autonomy of art which he defends less originally in his critical writing: the inspirational value of a melancholy which, in the restricted space of poetry, ignores its causes in order to produce some dazzling effects.

It's perhaps the ambiguous privilege of "realistic" prose fiction to deplore this autonomy of the imagination while dramatizing it. Flaubert gives us Emma Bovary's extravagantly romantic fantasies; but he also gives us the *time* during which she waits for them to appear as actual events. What I referred to earlier as Emma's floating anxiety can be thought of most simply as her boredom with a

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world inadequate to her dreams of romantic excitement. But in treating this state of mind, which at first glance would hardly seem to require a revolution in literary practice, Flaubert commits himself to a kind of sustained meaninglessness which justifies his title as the prophet of today's literature of boredom. He illustrates an imbalance between the self and the world which most of the romantics, for all their sense of being lost in a hostile or indifferent universe, were able to avoid by dramatizing their despair, by seeing the world — especially certain aspects of nature — almost entirely as a metaphor for their emotions. Thus literature, in the midst of crisis, could continue to represent adequate and intelligible correspondences between the self and the world. But while Emma is painfully aware of the unrelieved drabness and monotony of Tostes and Yonville, her dreams, absolutely unrepresentable in the world she inhabits, remain ideally abstract. She does of course try to materialize those dreams. Her richness as a "character" in the conventional sense depends largely on an extraordinarily acute sensuality which both cheapens her spiritual life and yet provides the only escape from the dubious profundity of imagination. Since she is incapable of imagining occasions for happiness which do not cater luxuriantly to the senses, Emma rejects her ugly provincial world but she continues to think of "felicity" as immediate sensual gratification. Her reckless spending is a desperate attempt to make the fabulous decors of literary romance believable by making them visible. She has an extravagant but exceptionally limited imagination: nothing is harder for her to conceive of than the novelistic adventures which she greedily but rather perplexedly devours. Therefore, the immediate cause of her suicide is, appropriately, her debt, for money is the talisman with which Emma tries to materialize love. It is as if luxury could give the prestige of reality to literary fantasy. Hopelessly sentimental but, as Flaubert says, impatient of anything which she can't immediately "consume," which doesn't provide an instant "personal profit," she seeks sensual stimulation from a fabulously rich world unavailable to her senses. Bored with what she knows but unable to find pleasure in what she can only think about, Emma tries to confuse perception with imagination, to induce sensations from fantasies. The exhausted debauchery into which she falls more and more deeply as the novel proceeds is due less to her actual adventures than to this more debilitating adventure of exciting her mind to satisfy her body.

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The unresponsiveness of Emma's environment to her dreams of glamor produces the "symptoms" which give her a deceptively complex psychology and obscure the highly original thinness of her character. I'm thinking especially of two agitated but empty periods of her life: the year and a half between the ball at la Vaubyessard and the Bovarys' decision to leave Tostes, and the time between Emma's realization that Léon loves her and Léon's departure from Yonville. At the beginning of each section, something thrilling has happened; at the end of both, we see Emma in a kind of catatonic stupor. But nothing happens in between; her sickness is purely imaginary. The excitement she felt at la Vaubyessard keeps her busy for a while: she dreams of Paris and even begins to buy the clothes and luxury objects she has seen in the fashion magazines. But the vulgarity of Charles and of Tostes debases and trivializes these fragments from a more glamorous world, and we watch Emma slowly sink into discouraged passivity. She abandons music, drawing and reading ("— I've read everything, she would say"), stares vacantly out of the window at the uneventful life on the streets of Tostes, becomes capricious, develops palpitations and a dry cough and remains "without speaking, without moving" after equally inexplicable outbursts of feverish talk. This instability is even more marked during the period following her discovery of Léon's love. Her immediate reaction is a voluptuous self-satisfaction which she enjoys by curious self-denials: she admires her economy in refusing the scarves and slippers Lheureux tempts her with, and she exasperates Léon by suddenly playing the role of the devoted wife. "Full of covetous desires, of rage, of hatred," hoping for some catastrophe that would reveal her love to Léon, but held back by "laziness or terror," she consoles herself by taking "resigned poses" in front of a mirror and congratulating herself on her virtue. But the strain is too much, and instead of seeking an escape from her suffering, she forces herself to think of it, "arousing herself with her pain and looking everywhere for opportunities to suffer." She abandons herself to wild adulterous fantasies, blames Charles for all her unhappiness and wishes that he would beat her so that she might hate him more intensely. When she thinks of running away with Léon, "a vague abyss, full of obscurity, opened in her soul," and she finally seeks help from the town priest, who has no idea what she's talking

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about. Her last hope gone, she returns home in a stupor, knocks her daughter down in a fit of irritation, frantically worries about the bruise on Berthe's cheek, but later that evening stares coldly at the sleeping child and thinks how strange it is that Berthe should be so ugly.

The absence of events thus produces rich enough psychological sequences. But there are already signs in *Madame Bovary* that psychological detail is merely incidental to what interests Flaubert most deeply in novelistic character. The most original passages in the first of the two sections I have been referring to are not analyses of Emma's feelings, but rather some coolly precise descriptions of Tostes. Emma watches, at an incalculable distance, the most ordinary events:

> How sad she was on Sundays when the church bell rang for vespers! She listened to each dull stroke with a kind of dazed attention. A cat walking slowly across the roofs would arch its back in the pale sunlight. The wind blew trails of dust along the highway. Sometimes a dog would howl in the distance. And the regular, monotonous tolling would continue to float from the belfry, dying away over the surrounding countryside.

More than Emma's self-punishing or sadistic fantasies, this kind of thoughtless stupor in front of the world dramatizes the anxiety of a consciousness living entirely off itself. Nothing in her fantasies *connects with* her environment, and the juxtaposition of her dreams with literal descriptions of that environment produces the effect of disconnectedness (it even accounts for the often awkward, enigmatic divisions among chapters) characteristic of the Flaubertian narrative. And not only is the world alien to Emma's dreams of romance; it also offers no images which she can use as a relatively appeasing spectacle of her anguish. When she returns from her fruitless visit to church, she is struck by the calm immobility of the objects in her house, "while she felt in herself so much turmoil." Flaubert's extraordinarily detailed and extraordinarily literal descriptions deprive Emma of what might be called any metaphorical relief. Things simply *are there*, much more so than in *La Nausée*, where the supposedly alien nature of objects is belied by the sickening richness of their metaphorical viscosity, a viscosity clearly projected on them by a highly particularized psychology. If it is true, as Jean-Pierre Richard has said, that Flaubert fears a perhaps similar absorption in a pasty

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world of undifferentiated liquid matter, this phenomenological obsession is largely irrelevant to his art. For the "solution" of writing (which, by giving the world sharply defined forms, also keeps it at a distance) immediately creates a problem of being which can be accounted for *only* by the inventions of art. True, Emma occasionally experiences a sense of oneness with the world: in the form of an ecstatic synchronization with the rhythms of nature when Rodolphe makes love to her for the first time in the forest, and, just before she takes the poison, in the form of a terrifying, vertiginous confusion between her frantic mind and a suddenly spinning countryside. But in a sense these "natural" illusions, even the terrifying ones, are privileged moments of exception. The deeper horror in *Madame Bovary* is Flaubert's stunning achievement of describing a world which represents nothing; for in the anxiety Emma feels in front of the most banal aspects of an astonishingly banal environment, Flaubert indicates the more profound mystery of a totally abstract sickness, that is, of an agony and a death whose insignificant cause is merely the exercise of imagination.

The profundity of Emma Bovary as a figure in literature has been obscured by her intellectual and psychological triviality as a "character." I would associate that profundity first of all with what may seem like a sign of her imaginative mediocrity: her indifference to, and curious irritability over occasions which seem to realize her dreams. For, even in this mortally boring province, occasions *do* present themselves: there are, after all, the adventures with Léon and Rodolphe. But, significantly, Emma is never more exasperated than during her love affairs. The affair with Rodolphe could, one imagines, have gone on indefinitely; it's *Emma* who ends it with her frantic insistence on transporting it to other, more "suitable" climates. And Léon doesn't really break with her; with docility and terror, he plays the pathetic games of an extravagant, brutal sexuality meant to deaden Emma's constant sense of "the insufficiency of life," of that "instant decay of the things she leaned on." And, even during their discreet, unavowed love at Yonville earlier in the novel, Léon's presence destroys the pleasure of thinking of him. "Emma trembled at the sound of his footsteps: then, in his presence, her emotion fell, and afterwards there remained only an immense astonishment which ended in sadness."

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What are the reasons for that sadness? Superficially, they are obvious enough: Rodolphe and Léon are hopelessly mediocre, and Emma's dreams of romance are so absurd that *no* lover could help her to realize them. But how important is the content of her dreams? The novels that have corrupted her are, on the whole, third-rate imitations of the great romantic works, but while Flaubert is obviously mocking those literary clichés of romance, nothing in any of his own works suggests that so-called superior art can provide more accurate images of reality. It matters very little that Emma's thought is trivial; we might even say that her mediocrity is an advantage in the novel in that it helps Flaubert to dramatize the essentially insignificant nature of imagination. James, who obscured the insubstantiality of imagination with the conjectures of enormously ingenious centers of consciousness, understandably felt that Emma is not an interesting or perceptive enough "vessel of experience"; her consciousness is "really too small an affair" even for "a picture of the middling." But Flaubert, as his later work shows even more clearly, is fundamentally unresponsive to the appeal of a psychological or intellectual richness to which he is still making some concessions in *Madame Bovary*. Emma's trivial mind ideally carries the weight — or the weightlessness — of the novel's self-destructive meaning. The astonishingly sympathetic identification between Flaubert and Emma can be explained by the simple fact that she lives in fantasy (any fantasy will do). The mediocrity of her thought is less important than the artistic rigor of her refusal to accept *any* equivalence between imagination and reality. She intuitively understands what was for Flaubert the central fact about literature: its fictions *resemble nothing*. The anxiety produced by that awareness makes her an object of subtle clinical observation, but her symptoms are irrelevant to the disease of imagination itself. So is her limited intelligence: method and discrimination have nothing to do with the life of the mind in its purest form, which explains why Bouvard and Pécuchet are the ideal Flaubertian heroes. The fact that they live only for knowledge explains Flaubert's uneasy sympathy for them; their grotesqueness is part of their unenviable integrity, that is, of their touchingly foolish attempt to derive a "truth" from the aleatory, arbitrary, infinitely rich and infinitely futile universe of words and ideas.

The *comedy* of imagination is the monstrosity called "realism,"

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and Flaubert rightly recognizes the fantastic heroine of *Madame Bovary* as a fellow realist — minus the sense of comedy. When Emma naïvely wonders what corresponds exactly in life to words like "felicity," "passion" and "intoxication," which she had found so appealing in books, she is repeating, in reverse, the question with which Flaubert made a torment of art. He had, on the one hand, an almost Platonic view of reality. He speaks in his letters as if "subjects" existed somewhere outside of language, and the tortuous exercise to which he condemned himself was to find the expressions which would merely convert reality, without changing its nature, into language. But in spite of the killing discipline to which he submitted himself in order to reach this goal, Flaubert naturally couldn't help but recognize the proliferating rather than the merely catalytic nature of language. And so, while devoting his life to finding the "right" words and the "right" rhythms, he came to have a polemical distrust of *all* fictive versions of reality. The subject of all his fiction, in spite of the obvious but superficial distinction between the realistic and the nonrealistic works, is the excesses of imagination. He both reveled in and deeply mistrusted those excesses. *Madame Bovary, L'Education sentimentale* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* are the equivalents, in Flaubert's career, of that familiar stylistic "fall" which, in so many of his sentences, deflates an eloquent fantasy with a prosaic detail. Emma, Frédéric and Bouvard and Pécuchet are the scapegoats through whom Flaubert does penance for *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* and *Salammbô*; scrupulously masochist, Flaubert sadistically punishes these inferior versions of himself for his own intoxicating inventions.

But Tostes and Yonville in *Madame Bovary,* while they are meant to provide an ironic commentary on Emma's sense of life's possibilities, strike us as hardly more real than Emma's dreams of romance, in spite of their "material" existence. For both the dreams and the bourgeois community get the same stylistic treatment. They are both absorbed into the monotonous rhythms of Flaubert's writing, into the *miroitement monotone,* as Proust called it, of Flaubert's style, which means that they offer merely parallel manifestations of *his* verbal virtuosity. What Albert Thibaudet labeled as Flaubert's *vision binoculaire* (the simultaneous perception of opposite poles of a subject which cancel each other out) is therefore less a corrective vision

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of reality than a repetitively nihilistic one. Neither "side" of the vision is allowed to settle into a definitive version of reality, although both are presented with a kind of maddening literalness and attention to detail. And this explains the precarious comedy of Flaubert's work, a comedy we might define in terms of the hackeneyed notion of his impersonality. He is, in a sense, nowhere in his work; but if he is constantly disassociating himself from it, it's perhaps less because of his famous disgust with life than because of his exasperated sense of an autonomous richness in words which makes his efforts merely to imitate reality in language look sickeningly absurd. Far from standing back in order to let reality speak for itself, Flaubert invades his narrative with a continuously recognizable voice which exposes realism as a chimera. While Baudelaire drew from his anxiety an almost exuberant theatricality, Flaubert (like Beckett today) gives us the comedy of anxiety: the grotesque spectacle of "texts for nothing," of literature as an interminable flow of an idle language richer and emptier than both the self using it and the world which it tricks us into believing it designates.

Rodolphe, Flaubert harshly notes, stupidly doubts Emma's love because he has heard the same language of passion from his other mistresses, "as though the fulness of the soul did not sometimes overflow into the emptiest phrases, since no one can ever express the exact measure of his needs, his conceptions or his sorrows, and human speech is like a cracked pot on which we beat out rhythms for bears to dance to when we are striving to make music that will wring tears from the stars." An inadequate vehicle for our feelings, language for Flaubert is no less resistant to adequate descriptions of the world: weeks of tortuous revisions might finally produce a more or less satisfactory passage describing the atmosphere of an agricultural fair. An ineffable self, an ineffable reality outside of the self; "between" the two, a language enigmatically indifferent to anything but its own seductive suggestiveness. Thus, the gratuitous expressiveness of words, which gives us the marvelous airiness of Diderot's *neveu* (and, long before him, the "irresponsibly" light fancies of the baroque poets), inspires in Flaubert an intriguingly tedious weighing of words in order to coerce them into exact correspondences with reality.

Now perhaps the only way to prevent the excessively and often

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nonsensically productive states of consciousness I have been speaking of from appearing as nonhuman inhabitants of the mind or as cancers of reality is to treat them as metaphorical entertainments, or as therapeutic metaphors. But the death of metaphor is the search for an original link — the "real cause" — in a metaphorical chain. Proust claimed, with some exaggeration, that he couldn't find a single beautiful metaphor in Flaubert's work. Flaubert's startlingly clumsy similes express his impatience with the epistemologically approximative nature of metaphor: things were not to be *like* other things, but each expression was meant to cover and absorb its hypothetically real subject with literal precision. Perhaps only in *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier* did Flaubert show that indulgence toward imaginative versions of reality which consists in living by them while recognizing them as fictive. The extraordinarily successful artifice of Proust is to subvert the credibility of his characters as "real" people and to demonstrate the kind of livable cohesion possible within a strictly personal labyrinth of metaphorical correspondences. There are no "causes" in *A la Recherche du temps perdu,* which means that Proust, unlike Flaubert, never had to cripple his inventiveness in an effort to make of his work a transparent, intelligible tableau of the real world. For to subordinate our imaginative excesses to autobiographical or external sources is inevitably to reduce the richness of imagination *and* to see the world as poverty-stricken as Homais' Yonville. And undoubtedly, in the same way, psychoanalytic explorations into the fantasies of neurosis work effectively only if the past is considered not as the cause of the present but as usefully supplemental occasions for "symptoms." What we like to think of as living in harmony with reality may be simply a knack for multiplying fictions, for accommodating new versions of experience to older ones so that we may impose a personal if always tentative unity on the inexplicable richness of being.

The alternative to this sort of submissiveness to our far-out states of consciousness is the Flaubertian panic at the mind's deceptive inventions and the torture of trying to be "realistic." Flaubert had the admirable dream of an ideally free language, of a literature in which, as he writes in a letter, "form, as it becomes more artful, is attenuated; it leaves behind all liturgy, all rules, all measured regularity. . . ." This "emancipation from materiality" would be the

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democratization of literature; it "can be found in everything and governments have followed it, from the oriental despotisms up to the future socialisms." The enemy of democracy is the rigid "orthodoxy" of dictatorships; the enemy of a free style is cliché, the *formes convenues* of the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. But Flaubert's horror of cliché is of course equalled only by his fascination with it. For the cliché is, in a sense, the purest art of intelligibility; it tempts us with the possibility of enclosing life within beautifully inalterable formulas, of obscuring the arbitrary nature of imagination with an appearance of necessity. Thus the drifting of imagination among its unaccountable fancies is checked not by the adherence of words to reality, but by the ideal *un*reality of a language which disciplines the mind by making it merely predictable. Obsessed by the distance between words and things, both Emma and Flaubert regularize imagination by mechanically formalizing it. All Emma's dreams resemble one another; she is as cliché-ridden as Homais. And Flaubert's prose, far from being "free," inflicts upon us the eternal ternary rhythm, the nonconnective *et* to introduce a final clause, the adverb at the end of the sentence and the deadening *c'était* at the beginning of descriptions. The high priest of style is thus the master of the rhythmical tic. By an irony which should now be clear, the fear of "unnatural" hyperbole in the self and in literature can be the triumph of an artificiality which just parodies inventive artifice. But anxiety may be simply an excess of invention over understanding; and, at least in literature, that imbalance curiously resembles creative exuberance.

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## Anthony Burgess

# SOMEBODY'S GOT TO PAY THE RENT

"There they go then," said Eustace Deschamps. "The first of the English visitors." He stood at the bar of the Café Trinidad (where, strangely, everything could be drunk except rum), fingering his glass of Byrrh, looking out, a day or so before Easter, at the sedate life of the street. Marot, the postman, stood with him, cheap white wine his tipple. He said:

"Yes. Drinking their bottled Bass at a great price. Smoking their Gold Flake cigarettes. They never come in here."

"Oh, but once one did," said Deschamps. A small rentier, he had leisure to observe. "But no, it was not an Englishman, it was a Scotsman in a skirt. He brought in his own bottle of whisky, as I remember, and sat at that table over there drinking it. He was silent and morose, most unsociable. A miserable sort of a holiday he must have had."

"And," said Desportes the flic, "there was the English lady that time."

"Ah, yes." Deschamps laughed. "Jean-Baptiste's English lady. His great love."

Jean-Baptiste, polishing glasses behind the bar, blushed deeply. He was a lantern-jawed man of thirty-odd, gentle in manner, with very bright eyes. He blushed, but said nothing.

"His great love," repeated Deschamps, "that his father stopped from coming to fruition. And she was not the only great love, if I remember rightly. There were others, but his father got in the way of those, too."

"I would thank you," said Jean-Baptiste gently, "not to talk about my father."

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"It would be a pleasure not to talk about him," said Deschamps. "But, Jean-Baptiste, in all honesty, how can you, a mature and well-grown man, submit to such parental tyranny?" He had, it was assumed, been drinking at home before coming to the Café Trinidad. It was rumored that he breakfasted on half a bottle of Pernod. "You are not permitted to love," said Deschamps. "You are not permitted to drink. You work long hours and you receive no wages. How can a young man like yourself tolerate such parental tyranny?" He was evidently pleased with the phrase. "Parental tyranny," he repeated. The clack of a typewriter started above their heads.

"The great man of letters is at work again," said Marot. "When shall we be permitted to meet him?"

"He never comes down," said Jean-Baptiste. "He just stays in his room, typing. He was typing all night last night."

"What is the great masterpiece he is typing?" asked Desportes.

Jean-Baptiste handed over a crumpled piece of cheap paper. "I found this," he said, "on the floor between his room and the toilet. I can make no sense out of it." The customers leaned over, squinting, and read:

". . . Tree-glint of greenness runs ajar with the pestilence of it. In love is no key, nor in excalibration of swords in trunks. Only when the flush of birds in cities of trees spatters aghast against the sky . . . ."

"A sort of surrealism," said Deschamps. "A kind of futurism or dadaism." The clack of the machine above their heads continued. There was the noise of slow heavy feet on the stairs. "He comes," said Deschamps. "The old one. Is his chair properly dusted?" In comic pantomime he flicked his bandanna over the high-backed chair in the corner. He stopped when he heard the creak of the door opening. A very old man stood glowering, breathing heavily at them. He said:

"Good morning, gentlemen." He was red and bald, his wrecked body huge, his hair a white aureole. He had a white beard and fierce white moustachios. His voice was, though old, deep and angry. He crossed, slowly and heavily, to his own chair in the corner, whence he could look out at the street if he wished. His son hastened to take him a big glass of urine-colored wine. The father said no thanks. He filled a vast pipe, lit it, puffed and coughed, then seemed to enfold

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his face in billowing tobacco clouds. The wine trembled on the table beside him.

"The old skinflint," muttered Marot. "Owns half the town and never dreams of standing a drink. Jean-Baptiste, you're a fool for putting up with it."

"Shhhhh," shushed Jean-Baptiste. "He's my father."

His father called out gruffly: "Today is rent-day, isn't it?"

"Yes, father. But nobody's been in yet."

"Makes his tenants bring their money to him," muttered Marot. "Like some baron of the old days. The great coughing monseigneur." The old man coughed and smoked away, pulling books and pencils and ball-point pens out of his huge pockets. The typewriter clacked on above. At length, a burly porter-type man, unshaven, tousled, a belt bisecting his paunch, came in with money. The old man said:

"Jacques Ronsard, isn't it?" He counted the notes and made an entry in a book. Shortly afterwards Henri Guérin came in and then M. and Mme. Samain. Money was received with a grunt, and book-entries duly made. Deschamps left, De Vigny the bank-clerk came in, Marot left, two unknown truck-drivers called for wine, Desportes went on duty. And still the rent-money rolled in. At length a young married couple came, embarrassed and nervous. The old man said:

"So, my young friends, you deign to call at last. My warning has borne fruit, no? It is a total of, let me see, two hundred and fifty-five new francs. The money has been a long time coming. Let me now see the color of it."

The young man, Blanchard, mumbled. "Certain difficulties. The laying-off of workers at the car-factory. The new baby."

"A new baby, eh? It is well that some can afford these luxuries. But first things first, my young friend. A roof over one's head comes first."

The young man asked for the grace of a couple of weeks more, hope of a job was mentioned, the possibility of his being given some washing-up work at the Hotel Belle Vue, next week without fail he should be able to pay something on account.

"In a resort like this, my young friend, a house can be a very valuable property. English visitors are asking for villas. It is the new craze. Your house would serve well as a villa. I could get three times the rent I ask from you."

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Without doubt next week he should be able to pay something. Perhaps — wait — even tomorrow. He might be able to borrow. His brother-in-law had had a small windfall.

"Tomorrow," said the old man. "I'm glad you mentioned tomorrow. Tomorrow will do very well. Two hundred and fifty-five new francs by this time tomorrow. The alternative you know. I am growing too old to worry about defaulting tenants. The axe," he said. "I am too old for anything but the axe. So tomorrow you will bring two hundred and fifty-five new francs. The alternative is eviction." And he made an axe-chopping gesture with his big pipe.

Have a heart. Be charitable. Give them a chance.

"I have given you enough chances." And then Jean-Baptiste saw, passing on the street outside, a slim golden-haired girl laughing, talking English. He remembered Sheila, their talks over the bar-counter, the walk they had had on the Feast of the Assumption, her quite adequate though schoolbook French. He said:

"Have a heart, father. Give them a chance."

His father turned on him bitterly. "Don't tell me what to do, son. You keep your nose out of these matters of finance. You carry on polishing your glasses."

Jean-Baptiste blushed deeply but said no more. Not until his father had called for his lunch and Jean-Baptiste had brought it from the restaurant across the street (soup of the day, salami and a loaf, a chive salad). Then he said: "They're a young married couple. You can afford to wait. You've more money in that safe than you count. It would be a divine judgment if you were burgled and lost all that money."

"I will not have you speaking to me that way, boy." The old man had breadcrumbs in his beard. "I will not have this filial impiety. If burglars come I shall know how to deal with them." The typewriter clacked on above their heads. "And don't talk to me about divine judgments. Divine judgments, indeed."

After lunch the old man went into the sittingroom behind the bar for his siesta. His snores rang loud. He had taken from the cash-register all the morning's takings except a handful of small change; he slept with the money and the rent-money in a brown bag in his fist. When he went upstairs to bed that night he would transfer everything to the safe in his bedroom. Jean-Baptiste had been permitted

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to buy himself a lunch of *moules* and a long loaf. The afternoon was quiet. And then Corbière came in, Corbière from the Café de Jeunesse. Jean-Baptiste and Corbière had their weekly game of chess. "How," asked Corbière, "is the mean old man with the snore?"

"Hush. He sleeps very lightly. He may wake up and hear you."

"He deserves to be told of his meanness. The meanest man in the whole of Moubassin." Jean-Baptiste, having translated his queen's bishop, looked up. A golden English girl on the street, laughing with her young man. He said:

"Parental tyranny. He's kept me down all my life."

"Rebel. Get out. Make a life for yourself before it's too late." Corbière had sad drinker's eyes, flecked green.

"He's old, though. He needs me." Throughout the afternoon the typewriter above had been clacking away.

"Ah, nonsense. He can afford help. A maid. A housekeeper. Who," asked Corbière, "is that typing away above?" He looked up, showing an ill-shaven nap below his chin.

"Oh, some relative," said Jean-Baptiste vaguely. "He keeps on typing away." And then, as though this were an inspiration tapped into him from above, "Would you like to buy some wine? I could let you have some cheap, very cheap."

"How cheap?"

"Well," said Jean-Baptiste, "how much would you give me for that case there and that case there, and I've another two cases like them in the cellar?"

"What's the catch?"

"There's no catch. It was you who said my father was mean."

Corbière laughed. "I see. That's a good boy. You're learning. I gain and you gain and the old man doesn't really lose. He's too old to worry about losing. Well now, let me see." He narrowed his eyes and looked around. "For that lot there and that lot there —" He waved at the dusty cases of a dozen behind the counter. "And you say you have another two in the cellar? Well, I'd say — Let me see —"

"Let's put it this way," said Jean-Baptiste. "I want one hundred and sixty new francs."

"Oh, right," said Corbière briskly. "That makes it a lot easier." And he got up, the chess-game unfinished, to look around. Finally

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he said he would give one hundred and sixty new francs for four cases of white wine, a case of rotgut cognac and some Japanese whisky (a slit-eyed man in a kilt on the label). Jean-Baptiste said, "Done." And they shook hands. Corbière said:

"Cash on delivery. You'll have to be careful."

"Cash on collection," said Jean-Baptiste. "It will have to be tonight. Say, midnight. When the old one's in bed."

"How about the man of letters above?"

"He types all the time. He wouldn't know what was happening. Nor would he care."

"I could, of course, borrow Richepin's van. That would be the best thing to do. On the stroke of midnight?"

"On the stroke."

The evening was a quiet one. The old man, refreshed by his siesta, sat with his moneybag by the open door. When he wished to micturate, he stumped slowly round the corner to the public pisseoir, moneybag in hand. He called for dinner at eight, and Jean-Baptiste brought it from the restaurant opposite. It was always the same, every evening: soup, bifstek and frites, a bit of bread and Camembert, half a bottle of red Bordeaux. Jean-Baptiste was allowed the same, less, for some reason, the bit of Camembert. At ten o'clock the old man stumped off to bed. Jean-Baptiste could hear the banging of the safe door above, then the long session in the toilet, then the squeal of bedsprings. At eleven o'clock, there being no more custom, Jean-Baptiste shut the café and put out the lights, then noisily made a show of going to bed. But nobody responded to the noise: the old man snored, the typewriter clacked, indifferent.

At ten minutes to twelve Jean-Baptiste came quietly downstairs. Snores and clacking. He took the cases, panting, from behind the bar counter and placed them near the locked front door of the café. Then he went quietly down to the cellar to bring up the other cases. As he came staggering up with the first, he heard something strange. He heard, from upstairs, silence. His father was not snoring; the typewriter had ceased clacking. And then a voice rang out from the typewriter room. It called:

"It is finished! It is finished! Listen!" Jean-Baptiste, open-mouthed, heavy case gripped in his hands, stood at the top of the cellar steps, listening. "And so," cried the voice, "it was finally decreed

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that love should neither reside in coffeepots, alligators, weathercocks, nor slink about underground in worm's or mole's guise, it should be self-evident in the world as any other human equation." Jean-Baptiste heard his father coming downstairs, stumping with surprising agility. He panicked, not knowing whether to rush back down, leaving the case at the top, or brazen it all out. ("You, father, made me do this. You wouldn't let me have love, money, freedom. Finally, you left me impotent to help. I had to take to crime.") But then, dead in front of him, was his father's bulk, the white aureole in the little light from the cellar's low-wattage bulb, the terrifying white nightshirt. "Rogues, rascals, thieves!" called the old man loudly. He had a big stick. "Breaking in like that, stealing my wine, how dare you!" He thrashed at Jean-Baptiste's head blindly. Jean-Baptiste slipped on the stair, lost his footing and went down, trying to shout "Father!" The case of wine bottles crashed all over him as he thumped and flailed to the bottom of the steps. At the bottom he struck his head with sickening finality on something hard and metal.

The Café Trinidad was closed next day, and the day after. The day after that, a bright young assistant or curate polished the glasses and poured from the bottles. Blanchard, unevicted, in a job at last. "What we want to know," said Eustace Deschamps, fiddling with his Byrrh, "is what precisely happened."

Corbière was there. "I can tell you part of the story," he said. He told it. "I feel a bit ashamed now," he said. "You see, I thought about it and thought about it and I couldn't just believe that he'd do it. I mean, after being under the old man's thumb all these years. It didn't seem possible that he'd find the courage to do it. I mean, does it seem feasible to you?" Deschamps, Desportes, Marot and others made sour mouths, saying nothing.

The typewriter was heard clacking away above. "Still at it," said Marot, "the man of letters. It must be a very long book."

"There was some talk about it being finished," said young Blanchard, "but apparently it's been started all over again."

"What I want to know," said Deschamps, impatiently, "is what actually happened. Is he alive or is he dead?"

"Jean-Baptiste?" There was some shoulder-shrugging. Marot said: "Nobody seems quite sure. Alive or dead, he's upstairs, and the old man won't leave him. The old man won't leave him even for

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a minute. Isn't that so, young Blanchard?"

Blanchard nodded that it was so. Deschamps said, cynically: "He'll be down to collect the rents. He won't miss rent-day."

"That's where you're wrong," said young Blanchard. "No more rents. He's not collecting any more rent-money. He says that Jean-Baptiste had paid all the rents for ever and ever. A queer sort of thing to say, but that's what he said."

"Astonishing," said Deschamps. They were silent, digesting this. The typewriter clacked away over their heads.

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Peter Caws

# WHAT IS STRUCTURALISM?

Primitive people, Claude Lévi-Strauss tells us, have a passion for naming, classifying and establishing relations between things, without much regard to the accuracy of the classifications or the objective validity of the relations. In this they resemble the French. It is no accident that Paris should be the world capital of fashion, one of the most complex and most arbitrary significative systems ever devised by man (and it is no surprise that the structuralist Roland Barthes should have devoted his latest book, *Système de la mode,* to a solemn analysis of this system). Nowhere is the preoccupation with system — or for that matter with fashion — more evident than in French intellectual life. Since World War II there have been two major fashions in French thought: the first was existentialism, which lasted until the early fifties, and the second, which took hold in the late fifties and early sixties and is now at its peak — or perhaps somewhat past it — is structuralism.

Neither existentialism nor structuralism has had the character of a movement in the strict sense of the term, in contrast to such prewar fashions as surrealism and Marxism. Marxism was naturally allied with the Party; surrealism was identified with André Breton and his followers. In both cases, of course, there extended from the center an intellectual region within which people wished to claim the title "surrealist" or "Marxist," although they might be disowned by the hard-core disciples. The center, for existentialism, was much less well defined; unlike Breton, Sartre never assumed the role of pope. In the case of structuralism there is not really a center at all. The founding father is generally agreed to be Lévi-Strauss, but there are at least four other people who occupy essentially independent leading positions, namely Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Barthes

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*Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss et Roland Barthes*

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and Michel Foucault. To make matters worse, structuralist habits and beliefs are quite consistent with those of many other intellectual movements. Movements succeed but do not replace one another; surrealism and Marxism are still very much alive, and Althusser is a prominent Marxist. Lacan, for his part, is a dedicated and fundamentalist Freudian who was strongly influenced by surrealism. The others have less striking doctrinal commitments, but they come from diverse professional fields — Lévi-Strauss from anthropology, Barthes from *belles lettres* and literary criticism, Foucault from philosophy. Little wonder that the standards of clarity and distinctness learned from Descartes by every student in the lycées have, confronted by the structuralist phenomenon, broken down completely. A kind of despair can now be detected on the part of French commentators on the intellectual scene; a recent article in the *Quinzaine Littéraire* entitled "Où en est le structuralisme?" begins as follows:

> ". . . In the momentary world of commercialized concepts, eclecticism is the rule." This statement of Alain Badiou characterizes precisely the intellectual debauch to which the pseudo-school which has been named *structuralism* has given rise.

The article makes the point that while there is a more or less identifiable set of contemporary activities properly called structuralist, the indiscriminate use of the term has made it almost useless.

A careful examination of what lies behind the fashion, however, reveals a quite definite, and I think very important, common element in structuralist thought which fully warrants the view that men as different as those named above form a single school, not at all deserving of the *Quinzaine*'s epithet "pseudo-"; the only trouble is that to call this school "structuralism," while not actually misleading, fails to indicate what is most significant about it and what binds its members together. The name says something interesting about the origins of the movement in structural anthropology and structural linguistics, but the line of thought that has emerged from the confrontation of those disciplines has more to do with linguistic and cultural products (myths, works of literature) and their relation to the problem of human subjectivity than with any concept of structure in the more obvious sense. Obviously there are structures in language and in culture, such as Navajo grammar or Tibetan marriage customs, and one might, to consider the anthropological case only, have expected

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that "structuralism" would have taken as its task the analysis of such objects in terms of the interrelation of their elements, by contrast to the "functionalism" of Malinowski, for example, which conducted its analyses in terms of social and psychological purpose. There is in fact an anthropological structuralism of precisely this sort, associated mainly with the name of Radcliffe-Brown. But the obvious structures, while not unimportant, are not what Lévi-Strauss is chiefly interested in. For him the really significant structures are beneath the surface, as it were — although all such spatial metaphors are dangerous — and may have a series of quite different embodiments at the level of apparent structure. A remark in his address to a Conference of Anthropologists and Linguists at Indiana in 1953 gives one of the clearest early indications of the line structuralist thought was to take. After commenting on the similarity of problems encountered in the two fields he said:

> . . . we have not been sufficiently aware of the fact that *both* language and culture are the product of activities which are basically similar. I am now referring to this uninvited guest which has been seated during this Conference beside us, and which is *the human mind.*

The event which has brought structuralism most vividly to the attention of the English-speaking world has been the recent publication of a translation of Lévi-Strauss' *La Pensée sauvage.*[1] It has been pointed out by a number of critics that the translation of the title (*The Savage Mind*) is unfortunate, and in fact it manages, with a single literalism, to throw the emphasis off to a quite extraordinary degree. The book is about systems of thought in so-called primitive societies, and the "savage" mind suggests a contrast with the "civilized" mind to be found in more "advanced" societies. All the terms in quotes, at least to the extent that they suggest a hierarchy of value (as they inevitably do) would be rejected by Lévi-Strauss. The trouble with "savage" in English is that it now has only one level of meaning; while it was once possible to use the term in a more or less descriptive way ("the friendly savages") it has come to mean hopelessly uncivilized or downright ferocious. "*Sauvage*," on the other hand, has the connotations of "wild" in English as it applies to plants

1. THE SAVAGE MIND. By Claude Lévi-Strauss. University of Chicago Press. $5.95.

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and animals which are not at all ferocious but on the contrary represent a special kind of natural value (*un canard sauvage* is a wild duck, not a savage duck). "*La pensée sauvage*" is therefore, as Lévi-Strauss himself remarks, "mind in its untamed state," and it represents not just the mind of savages but the human mind, and therefore *our* mind. It is this relevance of his work to contemporary man's understanding of himself that has placed Lévi-Strauss at the center of the current intellectual scene.

It is worth noting that the universality which Lévi-Strauss attributes to mind does not involve him in the absurdity, as some have suggested, of maintaining that there is no essential difference between primitive societies and modern ones. The difference, however, he sees as one of social organization and not as involving essentially a disparity of mental powers or even of patterns of thought. In an interview (one in a series with Georges Charbonnier, published as an issue of *Les Lettres nouvelles* in 1961) he compares the two types of society to two types of machine, clocks and steam engines: primitive societies, like clocks, use a constant input of energy and "have a tendency to maintain themselves indefinitely in their initial state, which explains why they appear to us as societies without history and without progress"; modern societies, on the other hand, like thermodynamic rather than mechanical machines, "operate in virtue of a difference of temperature between their parts . . . (which is realized by different forms of social hierarchy, whether slavery, serfdom, or class distinctions); they produce much more work than the others, but consume and progressively destroy their sources of energy." This is not doctrinaire Marxism of the kind that is to be found in Althusser, for example, but it does represent a willingness, common to all the structuralists, to take Marx seriously and to admit the validity of many of his criticisms of Western civilization, an attitude which is in refreshing contrast to the polarity of disapproval and defiance which still clings, now somewhat vestigially, to discussions of such questions in the United States. In fact I think it is possible to account for the difference in other than social terms without abandoning the structuralist approach (and without, of course, mitigating the social consequences), but that is getting ahead of the exposition.

It has by now become a commonplace of linguistics that the oldest languages are not necessarily the simplest, from the point of view either of grammar or of vocabulary. The complexity of ancient (and of

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primitive) grammar has always been a puzzle, although in the structuralist context it is easy enough to see it as a manifestation of a constant mental complexity; the standard account of the complex vocabulary, however, has been that it answered to certain strictly practical needs of the users of the language — as reflected in the fact, for example, that there are seven Eskimo words for "snow." But Lévi-Strauss amasses a great quantity of evidence to show that the naming of details of variation in the natural environment, among primitive people, goes far beyond any possible considerations of utility and amounts to what he calls a "science of the concrete" — not always accurate by the standards of modern classification (although far more so than early ethnologists were prepared to believe), but having in the primitive intellectual world just the function that science, in its nonutilitarian aspect, has in ours, namely that of organizing the totality of experience into a coherent whole. Using the resources of this rich descriptive language the primitive mind shows a tendency to build intelligible structures on more abstract levels: magic, which corresponds to science in its practical aspect (and which sometimes works, although that is not of the first importance); myth, which corresponds to literature; totemism, which corresponds to morality in providing rules of conduct of a satisfyingly rigorous nature, offenses against which are suitably dangerous. Modern man thinks of these things as childish curiosities which he has long since outgrown, failing to see that science is his magic, literature and other forms of entertainment his myths, morality his totemism.

Part of what conceals from us our interior link with the primitive is a habit, inculcated by the development of modern science, of looking for the *proper* way of building these various structures, on the assumption that the main function of language is to communicate truth and that consistency is a greater virtue than creativity (except, of course, within the carefully marked-off region known as "art"). We have all become engineers with concepts, working from plans and anxious to get the structure right. The primitive however is not an *ingénieur* but a *bricoleur* (a word for which there is no really satisfactory English equivalent). He puts together his structures from whatever comes in handy, without special concern for the congruity of their elements. *Bricolage* is the kind of thing that is made out of tar paper and baling wire; the *bricoleur* is the handyman, the tinkerer, who gets surprisingly practical (and often aesthetic) results from the

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most unlikely material. One of the fundamental theses of *La Pensée sauvage* is that the structure is all-important, the material largely irrelevant; it is as though the mind had to busy itself about something of sufficient complexity, but cared very little about the nature (or the logical level) of its components. Lévi-Strauss gives many examples of homologous mythical structures in which elements and relations change places from one tribe to another, sometimes arriving at what in Western eyes would be a complete contradiction; the native informer, however, recognizes the same structure beneath the contradiction and cannot understand why an apparent inconsistency matters.

Although the "same" structure can sustain different embodiments, that does not mean that the primitive mind apprehends it as disembodied. This is one of the most elusive but most important points in structuralist theory. As Jean Pouillon puts it in his "Essai de définition," at the beginning of a recent issue of *Les Temps modernes* devoted to structuralism:

> Structuralism is not formalism. On the contrary, it challenges the distinction between form and matter, and no matter is *a priori* inaccessible to it. As Lévi-Strauss writes, "form defines itself by opposition to a content which is exterior to it; but structure has no content: it is itself the content, apprehended in a logical organization conceived as a property of the real."

The world becomes intelligible as it becomes structured, primarily through the agency of language, secondarily through the agency of magic, totem and myth. There are many languages and many myths; structuralism finds that they are homologous, and capable of being generated out of one another by means of suitable transformations. Language, myth, and so on represent the way in which man has been able to grasp the real, and for him they constitute the real; they are not structures *of* some ineffable reality which lies behind them and from which they are separable. To say that the world is intelligible means that it presents itself to the mind of the primitive as a message, to which his language and behavior are an appropriate response — but not as a message *from elsewhere*, simply as a message, as it were, in its own right. I am aware that this way of talking seems obscure, and uncomfortably reminiscent of McLuhan, but it is the way Lévi-Strauss has chosen to express the natural assumption of intelligibility with which mind confronts the world. The message, furthermore, is unitary, a fact which modern man easily forgets:

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> . . . we prefer to operate with detached pieces, if not indeed with "small change," while the native is a logical hoarder: he is forever tying the threads, unceasingly turning over all the aspects of reality, whether physical, social or mental. We traffic in our ideas; he hoards them up.

And in this way he avoids the fragmentation we frequently lament in our own lives. But it would be a mistake to suppose that he has access to a kind of conceptual stability denied to us, by virtue of some now lost insight into things as they are. He looks for no such insight and therefore does not miss it; it is enough to be engaged in the structuring activity, whatever form it may take, to be relieved of any uneasiness about lack of foundations or of meaning or of the other things for which modern man, anguished and alienated as he is, often yearns so eloquently.

If mind in its natural state finds this psychic equilibrium so easily, how does it come about that modern man has such difficulty in adjusting himself to the conditions of his existence? We may have moments of equilibrium, significantly enough when we are wholly engaged in some activity (as might by now be expected, it doesn't matter much *what* activity, whether athletic, intellectual or artistic), but left to our own reflective devices we tend to be a bewildered and discontented lot. This bewilderment and discontent manifest themselves in all sorts of projects for self-improvement, self-realization, even self-discovery, all of which the primitive would find completely mystifying. He is in the fortunate condition of not knowing that he has a self, and therefore of not being worried about it. And the structuralists have come to the conclusion that he is nearer the truth than we are, and that a good deal of our trouble arises out of the invention of the self *as an object of study*, from the belief that man has a special kind of being, in short from the emergence of humanism. Structuralism is not a humanism, because it refuses to grant man any special status in the world. Obviously it cannot deny that there are individual men who observe, think, write and so on (although it does not encourage them in the narcissistic effort of "finding themselves," to use the popular jargon). Nor does it deny that there are more or less cohesive social groups with their own histories and cultures. Nothing concrete recognized or valued by the humanist is excluded, only the theoretical basis of humanism. In order to clarify this point it is necessary to consider the central question of structuralism, which

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comes to dominate all discussions of it (as for example it did most strikingly a year ago at the Johns Hopkins conference), namely the status of the *subject*.

The subject, first of all, is a linguistic category, the "vantage" (to use an expression due to Benveniste) of verbs in the first person. As such it is important only for purposes of clarity in reference: it avoids confusion between persons. (Strictly speaking the first person refers to the subject "*I*"; the other "personal" subject *you* and the "nonpersonal" subject *he*, however, do not lend themselves as readily to overinterpretation.) The subject is a vantage-point in nonlinguistic senses too: *I* look at the world from a particular point of view, *I* act upon it from a particular strategic location. So far there is no difficulty about the matter. But — whether under the influence of Greek philosophy, or Christianity, or Renaissance humanism — Western man began to look for a more substantial embodiment of the subject than that provided by his own contingent and transient body as percipient and agent, or by his linguistic habits as a mere point of reference. Just as the assertion that the world is a message now elicits the immediate response "from whom?" so the intelligibility of the world seems to be addressed to something more basic and more permanent that the momentary and evanescent subject of particular utterances or particular actions. If God had to be invented to originate and sustain the world, man had to be invented to perceive and understand it. Men therefore began to ask "What am I?" in a nonlinguistic sense, much as they also asked "What is matter?" or "What is gravity?" They began, in other words, the long and frustrating attempt to get the subject out into the world so that it could be examined objectively. But this involves a logical mistake and can easily lead to a psychoanalytic disaster.

The psychoanalyst among the structuralists is of course Lacan, and he has devoted a large part of his work to the problem of subjectivity. Lacan's career began at least as early as Lévi-Strauss', and it is evident from his collected writings (*Ecrits*, 1966) that he represents a genuinely independent source for structuralism. His reputation in France rests mainly on his Seminar at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, whose members hold him in a regard reminiscent of that in which Wittgenstein was reputedly held by his students at Cambridge. Lacan has been in no special hurry to get his ideas into general circulation, and there is no systematic development to

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be traced. Starting always from Freud, he wanders by circuitous paths, and in a highly personal, extremely difficult and often irritating style, compounded with verbal preciosity, hermetic allusions and a kind of half-concealed amusement at the whole enterprise, into various problematic corners of contemporary thought. The impressive thing is that (once the barrier of style has been surmounted) he consistently throws light on them from a completely original angle.

What makes Lacan a structuralist is his insistence on the central place of language. "Whether it wishes to regard itself as an agent of cure, of development, or of inquiry," he writes,

> psychoanalysis has but one medium: the word of the patient. . . . We shall show that there is no word without response, even if it is greeted only with silence, as long as there is a hearer, and that that fact is the clue to its function in analysis. . . .

This shows at once the parallel with Lévi-Strauss, although with a difference of scale: the message is particular rather than universal. The structure of language is, as before, the key to the structure of mind. On the opening page of *Ecrits*, in a short introduction to the collection as a whole, Lacan provides a characteristic example of his own style and a characteristically involuted formulation of a problem:

> "Style is the man himself," we repeat, without seeing in it any malice, nor being troubled by the fact that man is an uncertain reference. . . .
>
> Style is the man, let us adopt the formula, only to extend it: the man to whom one addresses oneself?
>
> This would simply be to satisfy the principle we have put forward: that in language our message comes to us from the Other, and to enunciate it to the limit: in an inverted form. (And let us remember that this principle is applied to its own enunciation. . . .)
>
> But if man were reduced to being nothing but the point of return of our discourse, would not the question come back to us what is the point of addressing it to him?

Once the urge to dismiss this as pretentious rubbish has been overcome it begins to reveal a preoccupation which, as much as anything else, is the hallmark of structuralist activity. The reference to self-reference, the idea of language doubling back on itself, are examples of that *dédoublement* of which recent French writers have become so fond.

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(It would not be improper, according to Lévi-Strauss, to think of his own work as "the myth of mythology.") They are important because the subject, for Lacan, turns out to *be* a kind of *dédoublement*, a matching of consciousness with the world, of speaker with hearer, of the signifier with the signified. The latter terms are from the linguistics of Saussure, and are of crucial significance to the structuralists. Whereas the civilized mind thinks itself capable of taking an objective stance and judging the adequacy of language or symbol (the signifier) to their meanings (the signified), the view of mind which emerges from ethnology and psychoanalysis suggests that the two realms are autonomous and that mind *is* precisely this adequacy, so that such objectivity is impossible.

This point is made again and again, in different forms and different occasions, in the writings of Lacan. The subject is an activity, not a thing; the Cartesian *cogito* comes closer to representing it correctly than any view of the self as substance, but even the *cogito* gives too strong a sense of continuity and permanence, so that it would perhaps be better to say *"cogito ergo sum" ubi cogito, ibi sum.* The subject produces itself by reflecting on itself, but when it is engaged on some other object it has no being apart from the activity of being so engaged. The idea that it had objective being and could be studied scientifically, according to Lacan, was a direct consequence of the success of science in throwing light on the rest of the world. The troubled Viennese came to Freud because he was a scientist and had the prestige that went with that identification; but when Freud looked for the subject in the light of science he found instead the unconscious, the Other, as Lacan puts it. Freud's own subjectivity, of course, was engaged on this quest, and its discovery by itself would have been, again, a case of impossible self-division. Although Lacan never quite puts it this way one could sum up the conclusion of his argument against the possibility of a science of the subject by saying: *the subject cannot be the object of science because it is its subject.* When the analyst tries to get at "the subject which he calls, significantly, the patient," what he finds is not the true subject at all, but only something called into being by his questioning: "that is to say, the fish is drowned by the operation of fishing. . . ." The final image of the subject, in the most recent writings, is the Moebius strip, or as Lacan calls it "the interior eight," which from two surfaces produces one, or from one two, depending on the starting–

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point. What Lacan seems to be saying is that the subject cannot give an analytic account of itself, only paradoxes, hints and images; and this being the case "there is no science of man."

> There is no science of man, because the man of science does not exist, only its subject.
>
> It is known that I have always felt a repugnance for the term *sciences humaines,* which seems to me a call to slavery itself.

One of the most powerful structuralist blows against traditional humanism was administered by the publication in 1966 of Michel Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses.* The starting-point for the reflections which resulted in the book, he says in the preface, was a text of Borges, which is worth quoting for itself as well as for the light it throws on the structuralist enterprise.

> This text cites "a certain Chinese encyclopedia" where it is written that "animals are divided into: a) belonging to the Emperor, b) embalmed, c) tame, d) suckling pigs, e) mermaids, f) fabulous, g) dogs running free, h) included in the present classification, i) which behave like madmen, j) innumerable, k) drawn on camel-skin with a very fine brush, l) et cetera, m) which have just broken their leg, n) which from a distance look like flies."

And Foucault continues:

> In our astonishment at this taxonomy what strikes us with sudden force, what, because of its setting, is presented to us as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own: the stark impossibility of thinking *that.*

Why, Foucault asks, do we find Borges' imaginary Chinese classification so preposterous? Into what intellectual straitjacket has our own history forced us? And he concludes that our resistance to this kind of spontaneous absurdity, our demand for logical coherence even where it is unnecessary, is again a product of the invention of *man* as an embodiment of analytic reason. Until early modern times individual and collective subjectivity were absorbed in Discourse, a human activity (a linguistic one, which in context amounts to the same thing) constituting the world as intelligible and summing up all that could be said about it. The rise of science led to the fragmentation and dissolution of this conceptual and linguistic unity, by drawing attention to separable properties of the world — biological, economic, philological — and pursuing them independently. But it then became

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apparent that in some sense all these enquiries were about the same thing; only instead of recombining into a single activity, they were thought of as pointing to a single entity — Man. Man thus appeared to have achieved his own objectification. The present perplexity of the so-called "humanities" indicates, however, that that conclusion was premature; the picture of man which they present to us turns out to bear little resemblance to the real thing. Humanism has been a detour from which we may be beginning to return to the main track: Foucault concludes with a more or less confident prediction that man will disappear "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."

This must not be misunderstood as a prophecy of doom. *Men* will still be here, facing the same problems in the same way, with the exception that the particular aberration called *man* will have been done away with. All attempts to classify and predict individual human behavior quickly encounter limits which show them, in all but a few cases (and all these to some extent pathological), to be futile. Rational, humanist aesthetics, for example, yielded when put into practice a wooden imitation of art; art began to revive in this century when the surrealists and others preached liberation from orthodox canons and advocated the free play of the unconscious. The havoc that the social sciences are capable of wreaking surrounds us on every side. There is nothing wrong with the social sciences, of course, if they are enquiries into group behavior or even individual behavior carried on by somebody for whom that behavior constitutes an object; they become dangerous only when ignorant people believe what they are told about themselves *and become what the social scientist says they are*. Structuralism, in effect, advocates an engagement with the world, an abandonment of too much self-examination in favor of participation in some significative activity, which in structuring the world will bring the subject into equilibrium with it. *What* activity is a matter of wide choice. There is nothing particularly worthy, as the existentialists thought, in political or even in artistic activity; any number of others are capable of embodying the structure of mind.

Art and politics, nevertheless, as two of the most comprehensive structures available, have come in for special attention, and above all literature, since it employs directly the very archetype of structure, namely language itself. But there is more than one kind of structuralist criticism, and the overlap with other preoccupations is greater here than anywhere else. The great triumph of the structural method,

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which imitated the sciences in producing new knowledge, remains in fact the work of the Marxist critic Lucien Goldmann on Pascal and Racine, in the course of which he was able to reconstruct some parts of the Jansenist movement which had been forgotten, and furthermore to find evidence that they had in fact existed (the relevant works are of course *Le Dieu caché* and *Correspondance de Martin de Barcos, abbé de Saint-Cyran*). I have not included Goldmann in the list of structuralists because much of what I have taken to define the movement does not apply to him, and his own method, which he calls "genetic structuralism," rests very heavily on the notion of literature as an embodiment (often in spite of the intentions of the writer) of some collective social attitude appropriate to a class or a period. Structuralist criticism in the wider sense does not limit itself to collective or social or historical considerations, although it does not ignore them either. The work *is* a structure; the critic uses it as a point of departure. One of the striking things about this criticism, in fact, is its habit of getting a great deal more out of a work than the author or for that matter his historical period could possibly have put into it. Foucault, in *Les Mots et les choses,* spends the whole first chapter on a painting of Velásquez, "The Maids of Honor," from which he extracts by hindsight and free elaboration a whole theory of the "absence of the subject" (another pivotal concept of structuralism). And Althusser, who has applied structuralist techniques to a "rethinking" of Marx, is said in a recent essay in *Aletheia* to have developed a complete apparatus "for putting oneself in condition to read Marx so as to think profitably not only what Marx wrote but also what he thought without writing."

This last claim, it should be noted, is not made by Althusser himself, and was not necessarily meant kindly. The same article calls Althusser's works (*Pour Marx; Lire Le Capital*) "limiting cases of interpretation," and suggests that what is presented there is not just Marx but something much more, which Marx indeed could not have created, since he did not enjoy the advantages of the intervening hundred years. And this is quite in keeping with the principles of structuralist criticism. The clearest statement of these principles is to be found in Barthes's *Critique et verité*, a response to Picard's *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture*, in turn an attack on Barthes's *Sur Racine*. Picard, a typical humanist, had become indignant at the way in which Barthes had, in his view, tampered with literary

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and historical objectivity, with the "facts" about Racine. (Another common element in structuralist thought is its distrust, in the so-called *sciences humaines,* of the flat empiricism of the natural sciences, principally because in the human context a great deal of interpretation goes into deciding what the facts are.) Barthes points out that there could be a "science" of literature only if we would be content to regard the work simply as a "written object," disregarding its sense in favor of all its possible senses, disregarding its author in favor of its more generalized linguistic origins — treating it, in fact, as the ethnologist treats a myth. What criticism does, by contrast, is to produce *one* of the possible senses of the work, to construct alongside it, as it were, another work (the interpretation) as a hypothesis in the light of which the details of the original become intelligible. "The book is a world," says Barthes. "The critic confronted by the book is subject to the same conditions of utterance as the writer confronted by the world." But the critic can never replace the reader; the individual also confronts the book at a particular time, in a particular context; it becomes part of his experience, presents itself to him with a certain intelligibility, as a message (from whom?); it engages him in another episode of the structuring activity which makes him what he is. An old book is not (unless the reader takes pains to make it so) a bit of antiquity, it is a bit of the present; consequently Racine can still be read, and new critical views about Racine, possible only in the light of contemporary events, can find in him without distortion meanings which he and *his* contemporaries could not even have understood. Similarly Althusser is justified in his rethinking of Marx; indeed all works have constantly to be rethought if they are to be more than archaeological curiosities.

The consideration of structuralist criticism brings us back to Lévi-Strauss. The critic never says all there is to be said about a book; his reading is always an approximation which we know to be inadequate, even if we do not know what would constitute an adequate reading — even if it makes no sense to imagine such a reading. Similarly language never formulates the world adequately; nor does myth; nor does science, in spite of its (now abandoned) aspiration to completability in principle; nor does history. These structures change in time (they can, to use structuralist jargon, be considered in diachronic as well as in synchronic aspects); also, which is not the same thing, they are dynamic, having complex interrelations among

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themselves. The respect in which I think Lévi-Strauss does not exploit the full resources of his own method in distinguishing between primitive and modern societies has to do with this complexity of interrelation of structures. If mind emerged, as it surely did, under evolutionary pressure which required an order of complexity in behavior greater than that of any other form of life, if when the evolutionary pressure was off it devised language as a means of keeping that complexity in dynamic equilibrium with its world, then it seems to me the way was opened for a kind of amplification of complexity by shifting language from the side of the object to the side of the subject, where mind (now ramified with language) became capable of handling an even greater objective complexity, and indeed required it in order to maintain equilibrium. We are perhaps today in one of the later stages of such an exponential development.

If that should be the case we might well cultivate the totalizing quality of the primitive mind, of which Lévi-Strauss speaks at the end of *La Pensée sauvage*. It is there (in the course of a polemic against Sartre) that he refers also to "this intransigent refusal on the part of the savage mind to allow anything human (or even living) to remain alien to it." This allusion to one of the oldest mottoes of humanism may seem an odd conclusion to a discussion of an anti-humanist point of view; but I think the truth is that here again Lévi-Strauss does not go far enough. To restrict the sphere of concern to the human, or even to the living, does not do justice to mind as its own history has revealed it. The structuring activity which keeps the subject in balance with the world is and must be all-encompassing. To quote Pouillon once more, "structuralism forbids us to enclose ourselves in any particular reality." The fact that we abandon a restrictive humanism, however, does not mean that we cease to be men. If structuralism had a motto it might well be: *Homo sum, nihil a me alienum puto.*

The danger with attitudes as generous as this is, of course, that they may in the end become completely uncritical. A theory that applies to everything does not distinguish between different things and might as well apply to nothing; if every human activity allows a structuralist interpretation, the fact that any particular activity does so ceases to be instructive. The structuralist thesis seems to me to bear the stamp of truth, but there is a penalty for arriving at the truth, namely that in at least one important respect nothing remains

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to be done. Here again there is an illuminating parallel with existentialism, and one that I think throws a good deal of light on the difference in habits of thought between French intellectuals and Anglo–American ones (especially philosophers). Once one *sees* that the conscious subject is isolated and alone, or that the variety of human activity is to be accounted for by an inveterate urge to build intelligible structures, everything appears in a new light, nothing is ever the same again — but for the most part the old problems remain problematic, at any rate from the analytic point of view. The fact that existentialism and structuralism do not lend themselves to theoretical elaboration may account for their unpopularity with Anglo-American thinkers whose tastes run to the technical and the abstract.

The French, on the other hand, never seem to tire of elaboration in the direction of the discursive and the concrete: literary philosophy permits the repetition of the same truth in a variety of ways, philosophical literature and *belles lettres* permit its demonstration in a variety of contexts. The best Structuralist writers have developed these forms to a point of great finesse. Jacques Derrida, the most recent star of the movement, exemplifies the philosophical mode brilliantly in his collection *L'écriture et la difference,* published in Paris last summer; Barthes remains the master of the literary mode, and his lecture on "La Mythologie de la Tour Eiffel," given during his stay in the U.S. this winter, was a perfect example of it. In the vein of his earlier *Mythologies,* it showed that while structuralism may leave unchanged the structure of the world at large, it *structures* for us the various parts of the world with which we come in contact — a process, in Barthes' own words, of "conquest by the intelligible." Its great contribution has been to provide a strategy for this conquest, to claim once again for intellect a territory we had all but abandoned to the absurd.

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Richard Kostelanetz

# A CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

INTERVIEWER: In high school you had a reputation as a person who could draw or at least do certain kinds of drawings.

RAUSCHENBERG: I never thought of it as much of an ability. I thought everybody could do it a little bit. Some people could draw a little better than other people, but I never took drawing or painting any more seriously than that.

Later, [Josef] Albers told me I couldn't draw — that my whole childhood was wasted. I had an awful time pleasing him. I was too messy for collage, and I was too heavy-handed in my drawings.

INTERVIEWER: He would like open spaces and thin lines.

RAUSCHENBERG: The Matisse kind of thing.

He would teach a course in form, which he gives year after year, refining it more and more, and a course in the performances of color — a really clinical method. We worked in drawing from the same model week after week. Once a week or once every two weeks, someone in the class at Black Mountain would pose for us. Then, he would talk about the valleys and the mountains and things like that about the figure. Other than that, it was an aluminum pitcher — a shiny volume without a straight line and you couldn't do any shading. It is really the outside and inside that you got to say. You do it with

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE: Although painting is Robert Rauschenberg's dominant interest, throughout his career he has kept an informal connection with theater. Back in the summer of 1952, at Black Mountain College, he participated in John Cage's "prehistoric" happening, an untitled event that established an American precedent for subsequent theater of mixed means. From 1955 to 1965 he designed sets and costumes, as well as controlling the lighting, for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; and in the early sixties he collaborated in theater pieces by Yvonne Rainer and Kenneth Koch. *Pelican* (1963) was his own first piece; and when he all but abandoned painting in 1965, he initiated a series of mixed-means theatrical works—among them *Spring Training* (1965), *Map Room I* (1965), *Map Room II* (1965), *Linoleum* (1966) and *Open Score* (1966) for the New York Theater and Engineering Festival.

Mr. Rauschenberg was born in 1925, in Port Arthur, Texas.

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one line, and you can't do any erasing. You feel that there is air on this side of the line and on the other side of the line is the form. In watercolor, we had it again — one model we used month after month; and it was a terra-cotta flowerpot.

I figured out, at least in the watercoloring classes, that what he really had in mind was something like Cézanne. I found Albers so intimidating that after six months of this, during the first year, my whole focus was simply to try to do something that would please him. I didn't care what I got out of class. All I wanted to do was one day walk in there and show him something and hear him say, "That's pretty good."

INTERVIEWER: I have noticed that you wish to avoid historical interpretations of yourself. In general would you prefer not to say that someone influenced you?

RAUSCHENBERG: No, I've been influenced by painting, very much; but if I have avoided saying that, it was because of the general inclination, until very recently, to believe that art exists in art. At every opportunity, I've tried to correct that idea, suggesting that art is only a part — one of the elements that we live with. I think that a person like Leonardo da Vinci had not a technique or a style in common with other artists but a kind of curiosity about life that enabled him to change his medium so easily and so successfully. I really think he was concerned with the human body when he did his anatomical work. His personal curiosity, apart from any art idea, led him to investigate how a horse's leg works so that he could do a sculpture of it.

Being a painter, I probably take painting more seriously than someone who drives a truck or something. Being a painter, I probably also take his truck more seriously.

INTERVIEWER: In what sense?

RAUSCHENBERG: In the senses of looking at it and listening to it and comparing it to other trucks and having a sense of its relationship to the road and the sidewalk and the things around it and the driver himself. Observation and measure are my business.

I think historians have tended to draw too heavily upon the idea that in art there is development. I think you can see similarities in anything and anything by generalities and warp.

INTERVIEWER: They are concerned with identifying influence and, thereby, continuities.

RAUSCHENBERG: There's another thing. Now we have so much information. A painter a hundred or two hundred years ago knew very little about what was going on in painting in any other place except with his immediate friends or some outstanding event. It wasn't natural

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for him also to take into consideration cave painting and fold it into his own sense of the present.

I think, if you want to make a generalization, there are probably two kinds of artists. One kind works independently, following his own drives and instincts; the work becomes a product, or the witness, or the evidence of his own personal involvement and curiosity. It's almost as if art, in painting and music and stuff, is the leftover of some activity. The activity is the thing that I'm most interested in. Nearly everything that I've done was to see what would happen if I did this instead of that.

INTERVIEWER: You would believe then that art is not a temple to which you apprentice yourself for future success.

RAUSCHENBERG: It's like outside focus and inside focus. A lot of painters use a studio to isolate themselves; I prefer to free and expose myself. If I painted in this room — the stove is here and all those dishes are there — my sensitivity would always take into consideration that the woodwork is brown, that the dishes are this size, that the stove is here. I've tended always to have a studio that was either too big to be influenced by detail or neutral enough so that there wasn't an overwhelming specific influence, because I work very hard to be acted on by as many things as I can. That's what I call being awake.

INTERVIEWER: People are enormously impressed by the variety of your work. How do you look upon your past work as a painter — as an evolution, or merely a succession of islands upon which you've put your foot?

RAUSCHENBERG: Looking back, I can see certain things growing, as well as a slackening of interest in another area because I am familiar enough with it. So far, I've been lucky enough always to discover that there's always been a new curiosity that is also feeding and building while I'm doing something else. I can figure out some logical reasons when I look back far enough, but I never do when I'm making the work.

INTERVIEWER: Let me take a particular example that interests me — say, the White Paintings [1952]. Here you have created what, if you believe in linear notions of art history, is a dead end. Did you look upon it as a gesture toward a dead end?

RAUSCHENBERG: No. It just seemed like something interesting to do. I was aware of the fact that it was an extreme position; but I really wanted to see for myself whether there would be anything to look at. I did not do it as an extreme logical gesture.

INTERVIEWER: But wasn't there an idea there — not a notion derived from art history but of a simple experiment, which was to see if a painting could incorporate transient images from outside itself? There-

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fore, once you discovered the result of that idea, then you could go on to another.

RAUSCHENBERG: You could speculate whether it would be interesting or not; but you could waste years arguing. All I had to do was make one and ask, "Do I like that?" "Is there anything to say there?" "Does that thing have any presence?" "Does it really matter that it looks bluer now, because it is late afternoon? Earlier this morning it looked quite white." "Is that an interesting experience to have?" To me, the answer was yes. No one has ever bought one; but those paintings are still very full to me. I think of them as anything but a way-out gesture. A gesture implies the denial of the existence of the actual object. If it had been that, I wouldn't have had to have done them. Otherwise it would only be an idea.

INTERVIEWER: Claes Oldenburg said that he has a dream that someday he would call all his things back, that they had not really gone away.

RAUSCHENBERG: I have another funny feeling that in working with a canvas, say, and with something you picked up off the street and you work on it for three or four days or maybe a couple of weeks and then, all of a sudden, it is in another situation. Much later, you go to see somebody in California, and there it is. You know that you know everything about that painting, so much more than anybody else in that room. You know where you ran out of nails.

INTERVIEWER: You can look at it then as a kind of personal history.

RAUSCHENBERG: It's not like publishing, for each one is an extremely unique piece, even if it is in a series. I like to look at an old work and discover that is where I first did a certain thing, which may be something I may just happen to be doing now. At the time I did that earlier piece, I didn't know it was the lower right-hand corner that had the new element — that that part would grow and that other parts would relate more to the past.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever started something that you couldn't finish?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yes, but I really try hard not to. I work very hard to finish everything. One of the most problematic pictures I ever made was something I was doing for a painters' picture series in a magazine. I had started the radio sculpture thing, which became *Oracle* [1965]. My mind was more in sculpture or objects free of the wall. I found I was uncomfortable from the new difficulties metal afforded, because I really didn't know what to do with it. So I figured that if I was to be scrutinized, I'd do a painting instead. I said I'd do it, and I try to do what I say I will do. That painting went through so many awkward changes, unnecessarily. It was large, it was free-standing. Then I put

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it against the wall, then I finally sawed it in half and made two paintings out of it. I wrecked one of them.

I didn't know what to do when Rudy Burckhardt came up and said, "How far did you get today? Can I take the picture tomorrow? Why did you do that? What do you have on your mind?" It just didn't work out. I knew I was compromising at the time; and when the article went in, I insisted that they photograph what I was not doing too. If those things are going to mean anything, they somehow ought to be the truth. In those days, it seemed like that would be your only chance for the next twenty years to get your picture reproduced in color. Now I have this lousy painting.

INTERVIEWER: In looking at your career, critics customarily tote up all the forms you have used: blueprint paper, white painting, black painting, collage, assemblage . . .

RAUSCHENBERG: I call those things "combines," because it was before the museum show of assemblages. Earlier I had this problem with the paintings that would be free-standing — not against the wall. I didn't think of them as sculpture. I actually made them as a realistic objection; it was unnatural for these to be hung on a wall. So when the sculptural or collage elements got so three-dimensional, then the most natural thing in the world was to put wheels on it and put it out into the middle of the room. That gave two more sets of surfaces to work on. It was an economical thing. I think I've been very practical. Sometimes the underneath surface is also a painting surface, because that would be viewed. In that one there is a mirror on the side so that you can see what is underneath there without bending down, or you're invited to.

I thought of them as paintings, but what to call them — painting or sculpture — got for some people to be a very interesting point, which I did not find interesting at all. Almost as a joke I thought I'd call them something, as Calder was supposed to have done with "mobiles," and it worked beautifully. Once I called them "combines," people were confronted with the work itself, not what it wasn't. Sometimes you can choke on these things; people have called my drawings "combine drawings." The word does really have a use — it's a free-standing picture.

INTERVIEWER: Just in passing, let me say there is one work of yours I can't deduce. That is the set *Factum I* and *II* [1957].

RAUSCHENBERG: There I was interested in the role that accident played in my work; so I did two paintings as much alike as they could be alike, using identical materials — as much as they could be alike without getting scientific about it. Although I was imitating on one paint-

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ing what I had on the other, neither one of these paintings was an imitation of the other, because I would work as long as I could on one painting and then, not knowing what to do next, move over to the other. I wanted to see how different, and in what way, would be two paintings that looked that much alike.

INTERVIEWER: How, then, did some critics consider this a comment on action painting?

RAUSCHENBERG: I think Tom Hess said that. Again, you see, if you do anything where an idea shows up, particularly in those years when an act of painting was considered pure self-expression, then it was assumed that the painting was a personal expressionistic extension of the man. The climate isn't like that now. We've had a history of painting here now, and I think it's unfortunately getting to be a lot like Europe. We have enough reserve work so that it is very easy for a tradition to exist here which also includes any new ideas, which are immediately tacked onto where we were yesterday.

INTERVIEWER: A painting is pushed into historical perspective before it has become history, as well as critically classified before it is perceived.

RAUSCHENBERG: I would like to see a lot more stuff that I didn't know what to do with.

INTERVIEWER: In several earlier statements, you said that your paintings were not the result of ideas. What you've said now, however, suggests that they stem from a certain kind of idea.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think the ideas are based upon very obvious physical facts — notions that are also simpleminded, such as, in the White Paintings, wanting to know if that was a thing to do or not, or in *Factum*, wondering about what the role of accident is. Those aren't really very involved ideas.

INTERVIEWER: That is different from the idea, say, of doing a painting about war, or the idea of realizing a premeditated form.

RAUSCHENBERG: They are more physical than aesthetic.

INTERVIEWER: Rather than posing a thesis, you are asking a question and then doing some artistic experiment to answer it or to contribute to an answer.

RAUSCHENBERG: But I do it selfishly. I want to know.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of idea, if you can remember, was present in, say, *Monogram* [1959], which contains a stuffed Angora goat?

RAUSCHENBERG: I have always worked with stuffed animals, and before that, stuffed baseballs — and other objects. But a goat was special in the way that a stuffed goat is special, and I wanted to see if I could integrate an animal or an object as exotic as that. I've always been more attracted to familiar or ordinary things, because I find them a

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lot more mysterious. The exotic has a tendency to be immediately strange. With common or familiar objects, you are a lot freer; they take my thoughts a lot further. Not only for content was the goat a difficult object to work with, but also because Angora goats are beautiful animals anyway. I did three versions of that painting. For the first one, it was still on the wall; I got him up there safely attached to the flat surface. To make him appear light — and this is the way my mind tends to work — I put light-bulbs under him, which erased the shadow of the enormous shelf that supported him. When I finished it, I was happy with it for about four days; but it kept bothering me that the goat's other side was not exposed; that it was wasted. I was abusing the material. So, I did a piece where he was free-standing on a narrow seven-foot canvas that was attached to the base that he was on. I couldn't have him facing the canvas, because it looked like some kind of still life, like oranges in the bowl. So I had him turned around, which gave me another image which didn't occur to me until, this time, only two days after I had finished it — a kind of beast and vehicle. It looked as though he had some responsibility for supporting the upright canvas or that pulling a canvas or cart was his job. So, the last solution stuck, which was simply to put him right in the middle — to make an environment with him simply being present in it.

INTERVIEWER: How dominant is he?

RAUSCHENBERG: He is dominant but I wouldn't worry about that as much as how dependent is everything else on him. I think that the painted surface and the other objects were equally interesting, once you see what the goat is doing there.

INTERVIEWER: But doesn't this presume that you forget about the goat to a certain extent?

RAUSCHENBERG: You forget about how arbitrary a goat is in the picture; that was never the point. It was one of many challenges, but it wasn't a function of the work to exhibit an exotic animal interestingly. Also, the tire around the goat brings him back into the canvas and keeps him from being an object in himself. You don't say, "What is that goat doing in that painting?" but "Why the tire around the goat?" And you're already involved.

INTERVIEWER: This, like so much of your other work, reflects a decided interest in working with unusual and challenging materials. What was your painting *Pantomime* [1961] about?

RAUSCHENBERG: I thought of it as making a surface which would invite one to move in closer; and when you move in closer, you discover it has two electric fans which then join you. I thought of it as kind of an air relief. Any physical situation is an influence on not only how

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you see and if you look but also what you think when you see it. I just knew that if you were standing in a strong breeze, which was part of the painting, that something different would happen. If I did make a point, it is that even the air around you is an influence.

INTERVIEWER: It's a way of saying to the spectator that the Metropolitan Museum right now, with all the pollen in the air, is a lot different from midwinter.

RAUSCHENBERG: Also, looking at pictures from one place to another, and also from one season to another, makes them different. That's why, then, the business about masterpieces and standards is all archaic.

INTERVIEWER: The notion of masterpieces presumes that if someone puts the *Mona Lisa* in a stuffy New York museum and you have to push your way through a large obnoxious crowd to see it, you should still be greatly impressed.

RAUSCHENBERG: Put it in the Greenwich Village outdoor show and see what happens. Put it in the Louvre and send it in with an armed guard, and people will see it. I like the idea of that kind of dramatic carrying-on, for that's part of our time too.

INTERVIEWER: Now that you have become so involved with theater, have you given up painting?

RAUSCHENBERG: No. That was a mistaken rumor. Giving up painting is all part of that historical thing.

INTERVIEWER: Will you be able to work on a painting while you are doing theater work?

RAUSCHENBERG: Absolutely, I always did that. You see, it sounds interesting for the painter to give up painting.

INTERVIEWER: It's the myth of Duchamp. Actually, I was thinking more of Claes Oldenburg's statement that when he did a theater piece he temporarily gave up painting.

RAUSCHENBERG: The last year before I went away with Merce [Cunningham] when I was doing a lot of theater [1963-64], I did more painting than I ever had before. If you're working on something, it seems to me that the more you work the more you see, the more you think; it just builds up.

INTERVIEWER: You would prefer, then, a more varied regime than a single setup.

RAUSCHENBERG: Absolutely. I find that when I'm working on paintings, I can do drawings I like very much, although I am forced to adjust to flat surface and a different scale.

INTERVIEWER: How did you become involved with theater?

RAUSCHENBERG: I've always been interested, even back in high school. I like the liveness of it — that awful feeling of being on the spot. I

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must assume the responsibility for that moment, for those actions that happen at that particular time.

I don't find theater that different from painting, and it's not that I think of painting as theater or vice versa. I tend to think of working as a kind of involvement with materials, as well as a rather focused interest which changes.

INTERVIEWER: How did you become the author of your own theater pieces?

RAUSCHENBERG: That skating piece, *Pelican* [1963], was my first piece. The more I was around Merce's group and that kind of activity, I realized that painting didn't put me on the spot as much, or not in the same way, so at a certain point I had to do it.

In some places, like London where [in 1964] the group was held over for six to eight weeks, and we did the piece of Merce's called *Story* three or four times a week, well then it was very difficult to do a completely different thing every night. A couple of times we were in such sterile situations that Alex Hay, my assistant, and I would actually have to be part of the set. The first time it happened was in Dartington, that school in Devon. The place was inhabited by a very familiar look — that Black Mountain beatnik kind of look about everybody; but they occupied the most fantastic and beautiful old English building, all of whose shrubs were trimmed. There was nothing rural or rustic or unfinished about it. For the first time, there was absolutely nothing to use; you can't make it every time. There was a track at the very back of the stage that had lights in it; so the dancers couldn't use that space. About an hour before the performance, I asked Alex whether he had any shirts that needed ironing, which is a nice question to ask Alex because he always did and he always ironed his own shirts. So, we got two ironing boards, and we put them up over these blue lights that were back there. When the curtain opened, there were the dancers and these two people ironing shirts. It must have looked quite beautiful, but we can't be sure absolutely. But from what I could feel about the way it looked and the lights coming up through the shirts, it was like a live passive set, like live decor.

INTERVIEWER: Would you do it again?

RAUSCHENBERG: I won't do that. You see, there is little difference between the action of paint and the action of people, except that paint is a nuisance because it keeps drying and setting.

INTERVIEWER: The most frequently heard criticism of *Map Room Two* [1965] is that it was too slow.

RAUSCHENBERG: I don't mind that. I don't mind something being boring, because there are certain activities that can be interesting if they are

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done only so much. Take that business with the tires in *Map Room*, which I found interesting if it is done for about five minutes. But something else happens if it goes on for ten more minutes. It's a little like La Monte Young's thing, [*The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*]. At some point, you admit that it isn't interesting any more, but you're still confronted by it. So what are you going to make out of it?

INTERVIEWER: However, there is a difference between intentional boredom and inadvertent boredom.

RAUSCHENBERG: I'd like it if even at the risk of boring someone, there is an area of uninteresting activity where the spectator may behave uniquely. You see, I'm against the prepared consistent entertainment. Theater does not have to be entertaining, just like pictures don't have to be beautiful.

INTERVIEWER: Must theater be interesting?

RAUSCHENBERG: Involving. Now boredom is restlessness; your audience is not a familiar thing. It is made up of individual people who have all led different lives.

I've been with people who have speech problems. At first it made me quite nervous, later I found myself listening to it and being quite interested in just the physical contact; it can be a very dramatic thing. I've never deliberately thought about boring anyone; but I'm also interested in that kind of theater activity that provides a minimum of guarantees. I have often been more interested in works I have found very boring than in other works that seem to be brilliantly done.

INTERVIEWER: What was it that made them more memorable to you?

RAUSCHENBERG: It may be that that kind of pacing is more unique to theater-going. The role of the audience, traditionally, I don't find very interesting. I don't like the idea that they shouldn't assume as much responsibility as the entertainer does for making the evening interesting. I'm really quite unfriendly and unrealistic about the artist having to assume the total responsibility for the function of the evening. I would like people to come home from work, wash up, and go to the theater as an evening of taking their chances. I think it is more interesting for them.

INTERVIEWER: I'm bothered about this juxtaposition of interesting and boring. What you're doing, I think, is setting up an opposition to entertainment.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think that's it. I used the word bored to refer to someone who might look at a Barnett Newman and say there ought to be more image there than a single vertical or two single verticals. If someone said that that was a boring picture, he was using the word in relation to a preconceived idea of what interesting might be. What

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I am saying is I suspect that right now in theater there is a lot of work described as boring, which is simply the awkward reorientation of the function of theater and even the purpose of the audience. Just in the last few years we have made some extremely drastic changes. Continuity in the works that I am talking about has been completely eliminated. It is usually different from performance to performance. There is no dramatic continuity; the interaction tends to be a coincidence or an innovation for that particular moment.

INTERVIEWER: What else do you think is characteristic of mixed-means theater?

RAUSCHENBERG: An absence of hierarchy. The fact is that in a single piece of Yvonne Rainer you can hear both Rachmaninoff and sticks being pitched from the balcony without those two things making a comment on each other. In my pieces, for instance, there is nothing that everything is subservient to. I am trusting each element to sustain itself in time.

INTERVIEWER: What do these changes imply?

RAUSCHENBERG: All those ideas tend to point up the thought that it would be better for theater that, if you went a second night, you found a different work there, even though it might be in the same place and have the same performers and deal with the same material. I think all this is creating an extraordinary situation that is very new in theater; so both the audience and the artist are still quite self-conscious about the state of things.

INTERVIEWER: You would agree with John Cage, then, that one of the purposes of the new movement is to make us more omniattentive.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think we do it when we are relaxed; all these things happen naturally. But there's a prejudice that has been built up around the ideas of seriousness and specializing. That's why I'm no more interested in giving up painting than continuing painting or vice versa. I don't find these things in competition with each other. If we are to get the most out of any given time, it is because we have applied ourselves as broadly as possible, I think, not because we have applied ourselves as singlemindedly as possible.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have then a moral objection to those dimensions of life that force us to be more specialized than we should be?

RAUSCHENBERG: Probably. If we can observe the way things happen in nature, we see that nearly nothing in my life turned out the way that, if it were up to me to plan it, it should. There is always the business, for instance, if you're going on a picnic, it is just as apt to rain as not. Or the weather might turn cold when you want to go swimming.

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INTERVIEWER: So then you find a direct formal equation between your theater and your life?

RAUSCHENBERG: I hope so, between working and living, because those are our media.

INTERVIEWER: You would believe, then, that if we became accustomed to this chancier kind of theater, we would become accustomed, then, to the chancier nature of our own life.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think we are most accustomed to it in life. Why should art be the exception to this? You asked if I had a moral objection. I do, because I think we do have this capacity I'm talking about. You find that an extremely squeamish person can perform fantastic deeds because it is an emergency. If the laws have a positive function, if they could have, it might be just that — to force someone to behave in a way he has not behaved before, using the facilities he was actually born with. Growing up in a world where multiple distractions are the only constant, he would be able to cope with new situations. But, what I found happening to people in the Navy was that once they were out of service and out of these extraordinary situations, they reverted to the same kind of thinking as before. I think it is an exceptional person who utilizes that experience. That's because in most cases the service is not a chosen environment; it is somebody else's life that they're functioning in, instead of recognizing the fact that it is still just them and the things they are surrounded by.

INTERVIEWER: So you would object to anyone who finds the Navy an unnatural life.

RAUSCHENBERG: It is a continuation of extraordinary situations. We begin by not having any say over who our parents are; our parents have no control over the particular peculiar mixture of the genes.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back over your involvement with theater, do you see any kind of development, aside from the obvious development that you have now become the author of your own theater pieces, rather than a contributor to somebody else's? Also, do you see any development in your company of more or less regular performers?

RAUSCHENBERG: Well, that last is mostly a social thing of people with a common interest, and we have tended to make ourselves available as material to each other. It is in no way an organized company, and it changes from time to time — people move in and out. However, where a play could be cast with different actors and you would still get the same play, if I was not in constant touch with these people, I could not do those pieces. The whole concept would have to be changed, if I had new performers — if I let Doris Day take Mary

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Martin's part in a musical or used the Cincinnati Philharmonic rather than the New York Philharmonic.

INTERVIEWER: You write for these performers, and they have learned to respond to the particular language of your instructions.

RAUSCHENBERG: It goes beyond interpretation of following directions. From the outset, their responsibility, in a sense of collaboration, is part of the actual form and content and appearance of the piece. It makes them stockholders in the event itself, rather than simply performers.

In *Map Room Two,* a couple of the people involved said that they had now gotten some kind of feeling about what I was after. Because this is my fourth or fifth piece and these people, if they weren't in them, had seen them all, then I think there is a body of work. If someone is working with an unfamiliar kind of image and if you see only one, it looks like a lot of things that it isn't and a lot of things that it is; but you don't really understand the direction. In five of those new things you're more apt to see what they are doing. It's like signposts; you need a few to know that you are really on the right road.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel stronger and more confident now in approaching a theater piece?

RAUSCHENBERG: Confidence is something that I don't feel very often, because I tend to eliminate the things I was sure about. I cannot help but wonder what would happen if you didn't do that and if you did this. You recognize the weaknesses in *Map Room Two,* for instance, that weakness of the neon thing coming last. *Linoleum* is probably one of the most tedious works I've ever done, the most unclimactic. If you're in the audience, you simply move into it with your attention and live through this thing. At a certain point it's over.

INTERVIEWER: How did you conceive *Oracle* [1965], your environmental sculpture?

RAUSCHENBERG: I finished it after I got back from Europe, after touring with Merce Cunningham. Technically, it had to be completely rebuilt, because ideas which had been impossible when I started in 1962, later became possible.

INTERVIEWER: In the technological sense?

RAUSCHENBERG: Yes. It is a single work with five pieces of sculpture. Each piece has its own voice. The controls are a console unit which is embedded in one of the pieces; and all five have a sound source. Each piece can be played independently, because the console has five volume controls, one for each piece. A scanning mechanism goes across the radio dials and provides a constant movement, so that what you control is the speed of scanning. All this gives you the maximum

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possibilities of varied sound, from music to purely abstract noise and any degree in between. Each piece can be adjusted accordingly. One of the ideas was to make it so simple that you would not have to be educated to do it — so that the thing would just respond to touch.

INTERVIEWER: When this sculpture is displayed, is someone working the dials or are they merely present?

RAUSCHENBERG: Anyone around it can change it; and it can also be set up so that the sound is constantly changing, independently of anyone's control.

One of the pieces, a cement-mixing tub, is also a fountain, because I wanted another source of sound too in running water. I didn't want to imply that these sounds all had to be electronic.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consider this an "environment" or a "combine"?

RAUSCHENBERG: Sound is part of the piece; it is not a decoration. It is a part of the climate that piece insists on. You really do get a sense of moving from one place to another, as you shift from the proximity of one piece to another piece.

INTERVIEWER: Because the field of sound is constantly changing. Several questions come to mind: Why the field of sound? How does the sound relate to the visual elements?

RAUSCHENBERG: The sound relates to the pieces physically by the material interaction — the particular kind of distortion the sound of a voice has as it is shaped by its context. "Why sound?" because hearing is a sense that we use while looking anyway.

INTERVIEWER: One of the myths of modern culture — I associate it particularly with Lewis Mumford's *Art and Technics* [1952] — is that art and technology are eternally opposed to each other and that one succeeds only at the decline of the other.

RAUSCHENBERG: I think that's a dated concept. We now are living in a culture that won't operate and grow that way. Science and art — these things do clearly exist at the same time, and both are very valuable. We are just realizing that we have lost a lot of energy in always insisting on the conflict — in posing one of these things against the other.

INTERVIEWER: In contrast to nearly all contemporary artists, you did not need to find your own style by first painting through several established styles — by taking them as your transient models. From the start, you were, as we say, an original.

RAUSCHENBERG: I always had enormous respect for other people's work, but I deliberately avoided using other people's styles, even though I know that no one owns any particular technique or attitude. It seemed to me that it was more valuable to think that the world was big

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enough so that everyone doesn't have to be on each other's feet. When you go to make something, nothing should be clearer than the fact that not only do you not have to make it but that it could look like anything, and then it starts getting interesting and then you get involved with your own limitations.

INTERVIEWER: As an artist, do you feel in any sense alienated from America today or do you feel that you are part of a whole world in which you are living?

RAUSCHENBERG: I feel a conscious attempt to be more and more related to society. That's what's important to me as a person. I'm not going to let other people make all the changes; and if you do that, you can't cut yourself off.

This very quickly gets to sound patriotic and pompous and pious; but I really mean it very personally. I'm only against the most obvious things, like wars and stuff like that. I don't have any particular concept about a utopian way things should be. If I have a prejudice or a bias, it is that there shouldn't be any particular way. Being a complex human organ, we are capable of a variety; we can do so much. The big fear is that we don't do enough with our senses, with our activities, with our areas of consideration; and these have got to get bigger year after year.

INTERVIEWER: Could that be what the new theater is about? Is there a kind of educational purpose now — to make us more responsive to our environment?

RAUSCHENBERG: I can only speak for myself. Today there may be eleven artists; yesterday there were ten; two days ago there were nine. Everybody has his own reason for being involved in it, but I must say that this is one of the things that interests me the most. I think that one of my chief struggles now is to make something that can be as changeable and varied and alive as the audience. I don't want to do works where one has to impose liveliness or plastic flexibility or change but a work where change would be dealt with literally. It's very possible that my interest in theater, which now is so consuming, may be the most primitive way of accomplishing this, and I may just be working already with what I would like to make.

INTERVIEWER: How will our lives — our ideas and our responses — be different after continued exposure to the new theater?

RAUSCHENBERG: What's exciting is that we don't know. There is no anticipated result; but we will be changed.

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# CALIFORNIA LETTERS

## Richard Schlatter

Friday afternoon was clear, warm and sunny in San Francisco. Having finished my work, I asked the porter in the St. Francis Hotel how to get to Haight-Ashbury. He told me to go to Market Street and take a Number 7 bus, which would take me there in about fifteen minutes. I got off the bus at Haight-Ashbury and began to walk, and what I saw was incredible. This is an ordinary San Francisco residential neighborhood — San Francisco is wonderfully handsome — with thousands of hippies sitting and wandering about, hair long and dirty, beaded, bearded, many with headbands, mostly with dirty bare feet, some with sandals, and bizarre clothes of all kinds. Lots of kids were selling mimeographed or printed sheets: some advocating the legalizing of marijuana and LSD; some praising sexual freedom; one asking for donations for the free medical clinic (it closed that day for lack of funds); and others denouncing the war in Vietnam and advocating love, etc.

I sauntered along until I came to an old movie theater. Kids were handing out leaflets inviting everyone to a free American Indian program which seemed to have something to do with the prophecies of the Great Spirit. I went in and sat down. All was leisurely confusion, with various people putting cushions on the floor in front of the stage and others taking them away, a rock 'n' roll record on the gramophone and everyone, including some stray dogs, wandering about genially and aimlessly. Garlands of marijuana leaves were being hung from the balcony. Eventually some Indians in costume arrived and one man talked a great deal of nonsense about the teachings of the Great Spirit. These teachings are supposed to be found in pictographs on the walls of kivas in Mesa Verde National Park. The Great Spirit had apparently prophesied the coming of the white man and the eventual restoration of the red man — typical millenarian dreams. But he was a nice Indian, all in favor of love, nonviolence, justice, equality and all the good things. And he

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implied that hippies were really honorary red men — or at least not white oppressors — and he was listened to with quiet enthusiasm.

Sitting in front of me were two attractive youngsters, and we began to chat. Harry began by asking me if I would like some LSD — he had some in his pocket. (I was naturally the object of some polite interest since I was the only person in tie and jacket and shoes.)

Harry is eighteen, from the Bronx, a graduate of the New York School of Performing Arts (in acting) and a dropout from City College. His girl, Kate, is from California, eighteen years old, the daughter of motel keepers, a high-school graduate who thinks she might sometime go to San Francisco State College.

They were charming, gentle and friendly, long-haired and barefooted. They invited me to come to eat with them — as their guest — at a hippy restaurant called the Macrobiotics. This is a hole in the wall, vegetarian, natural-food–fetish place with meals of carrot and apple juice, soy beans, brown rice and so on, all for 50¢. The customers help themselves to the food, play flutes and guitars, sing and relax. Harry and Kate spoke with great conviction of the virtues of nature, natural food, Thoreau and the evils of tobacco and alcohol. And again pressed me to try some marijuana and LSD.

We went back to the theater, and I listened again to the Indian preacher until I was bored, and then asked Harry and Kate if they would like to come to dinner at the St. Francis Hotel. Neither one, obviously, had ever been to a fancy restaurant before, and they were very sweetly and adolescently game for an adventure, laughing a little at their own willingness to be corrupted. I warned them that some degree of formal dress would be necessary, and they agreed.

I met them in the rather grand and red plush lobby of the St. Francis at 6:30, and they looked amazing. Harry, a slight beardless boy, had brushed his long blond hair smooth, borrowed a shirt, tie and jacket and an old pair of corduroys. In addition, he had put on some gold pince-nez glasses with a gold chain pinned to his jacket and one large gold earring. Kate had braided her long black hair — she's a handsome and shapely girl — borrowed a plain mini-skirted dress and white stockings, and both had found some fairly respectable-looking sandals.

I took them to the elegant French restaurant in the St. Francis Hotel. I had been there before and the head waiter greeted me as an old patron and showed no surprise at my young guests. We had the works — cocktails (which they thought wonderfully wicked, since they were non-alcoholics, and since they were only eighteen years old), shrimp, vichyssoise, salad, filet mignon, French pastry, Tavel Rosé 1964 and demitasses. I, of course, ate only a little of all this, and they, like all

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kids — especially half-starved ones — began by eating all the rolls and butter, and then ate everything else as well. They were radiantly exuberant and wanted to try everything; made me translate all the French on the menu; talked without stopping; and ended up stuffed to the point of feeling sick.

During the meal Kate remarked that if she had stayed with her "middle-class parents" she would have been bored to death and would never have met anyone so grand as Harry. She said this very quietly and unaggressively, and it was very convincing.

They were both typical hippies, I suppose — very gentle, unaggressive, affectionate, naïve and ignorant. They know nothing: no history, no literature, no art, except a little Pop, lots of rock 'n' roll, underground movies and the painting and poetry they do themselves, plus what they had in high school. This latter is, I suppose, quite a lot, but they have successfully ignored it. They are self-consciously detached from the culture around them and have no interest in money, success, jobs or politics, except that they are pacificists and believe in racial equality. But unlike the radical kids who have so much to hate and are so aggressive (perhaps properly so), these kids are extraordinarily gentle and soft-spoken and mild.

They are religious, I suppose, in an undogmatic and wholly uncritical and uninformed way. They like everything from Indian Great Spirits to Hindu mystics. Kate gave me a two-minute lecture on how she had come, recently, to believe in God and immortality. And all this, of course, gets mixed up with marijuana and LSD.

I asked them how they lived, and they said, very offhandedly and with no sense of guilt, that they and their friends buy marijuana for $90 a kilo, make cigarettes worth $240 and sell them to San Francisco high-school kids. They have some fear of going to jail, but have escaped arrest so far. When I asked Harry about the draft, he said he would wait until called for his physical, take a good dose of LSD and tell the doctor he hoped to be able to introduce soldiers to the benefits of pot and acid. His friends who have done this have apparently been let off.

When we finished dinner, I asked them if they would like to go to the bar at the top of the Fairmont. They were delighted, and we started off. As we went through the lobby of the St. Francis, Harry said to some especially coarse-looking businessmen and their wives, "I love you." He meant it. But they looked sour!

I got them out of the lobby and suggested we take a taxi to the Fairmont. They were astonished at this ridiculous extravagance, and before I knew what was happening Harry opened the door of a Chrysler Imperial waiting for a red light in front of the St. Francis and asked the

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two young ladies inside if they would give us a ride. So I had my first hitchhike in forty years.

They were entranced by the Fairmont Hotel bar and the glass elevator and the grand view of all San Francisco at night. And joked about how they were being corrupted. They were so certain of their own convictions, that this was not a world that they wanted but one which they were merely visiting for the moment as tourists, that they could be gay about it.

Finally, at the Fairmont they became very serious and evangelical about drugs, especially LSD, and literally begged me to come with them, then and there, for a "trip." Harry had some LSD in his pocket. They spoke in the usual clichés about a new awareness, a mystical experience, a vision of God. They urged me not to be afraid and, being completely antiscientific, dismissed my talk of physical damage as Establishment propaganda. They did admit that they would not urge drugs on anyone who was mentally ill, but they did not seem to weigh this very heavily.

They were shyly and sadly disappointed when I said no with finality. And I was sad that I could not even attempt to dissuade them — they liked me just because I didn't preach at them.

These are charming, naïve, ignorant and carefree children. I have considerable admiration for their rejection of the terrible world around them. But they are going to be hurt — possibly physically by drugs (each of them has had about twenty LSD trips already) and by the facts of life which will allow them this freedom for only a little while of their youth and then will make them pay heavily. These two had been in Haight-Ashbury only this summer and had some vague notion of leaving sometime soon. Perhaps they will escape. At one point, I suggested that the world was full of pain and tragedy and Harry said very firmly, "The world is a bowl of cherries."

We rode the cable car back to the St. Francis Hotel, and I said good-bye to them in the lobby. They said they would like to have a post-card from me, but since they had no address this would be impossible. I asked them to visit me in New Brunswick, and they promised to come.

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## Thomas R. Edwards

When I lived in Southern California some years ago I resented the apparent assumption of Eastern friends that I was somehow to be pitied. It didn't *feel* like nowhere, and it seemed an enviable existence when I (rather too frequently) imagined a me who had stayed behind and missed it all. I soon learned to recognize this as the incipient stages of a cultural paranoia that possesses all Californians — the conviction that one's occupations and comforts, however respectable and finely achieved, are being scrutinized and coolly dismissed by invisible enemies (all remarkably like Henry James) who, though they've never been west of Albany, sit in maddeningly irrefutable judgment over lives Out There. Californians might go to Europe twice a year, they might develop magisterial tastes in wine or literature and painting, or cultivate the humble salad into a high and complex art, they might achieve a domestic style that was externally as pleasant as any in the world — and yet they would know that they were really funny and pathetic just the same. The history of Populism in politics and of radical modernisms in the arts draws extensively on this mood; from Hiram Johnson and Upton Sinclair to Reagan and Savio, from Jack London and Gertrude Stein to Jackson Pollock and the Beats, the West has been imagining roles for itself that can resist transformation into Christopher Newman or Barry Goldwater, those fictional embodiments of Western moral energy and responsiveness to life entrapped and humiliated by Eastern sophistication.

When after eight years of this I went back East, the extent of my delusion came as some surprise. People were anything but contemptuous of the West, California was an object of interest and concern if not of pure enthusiasm. Everyone had been there or was going or hoped to go if someone would pay the fare, and finding myself occasionally mistaken for a kind of expert, I could only sustain my dignity by inventing skepticisms I hadn't really felt before. "Oh yes, we *liked* it — you know, the sun and all that — but there really wasn't much Going On and now that we're *back*. . . ." (Such betrayal has its own parallels in politics and the arts.) Now, in California again for a long but temporary visit, I wonder what line I can take this time.

The San Francisco Bay area is of course quite different in touch

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from the Los Angeles sprawl. Here the paranoia takes the form of an earnest and resourceful imitation of that distant, normative civilization, with an equally resourceful flair for coyness and self-mockery. The belligerence that makes Southern California insist that it's a giant cartoon — the willful vulgarity with which Los Angeles offers itself as easy meat for satiric Eastern novelists with their fine discriminations — is in San Francisco replaced by a general agreement that, as the game is lost before it starts, one had better keep grinning to show it's all in fun. I have never found a city so girlishly excited and charmed by its own absurdity, or so calculating about inventing absurdity when it ceases to generate itself.

Self-ridicule is, for example, the stock in trade of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, whose very copyboys must be Restoration wits. Thanks to its unspeakable competition — Hearst's *Examiner* ("Brand Ex" to the *Chronicle*) and Knowland's *Oakland Tribune* — the *Chronicle* is inescapable, and after a steady dose of its hallucinogenic style it's hard to see things except in its curious colors. It's a paper that manages unerringly to trivialize even its own instinct for good causes; editorials, columnists, even sports stories and news reports are unabashedly slanted toward surprisingly enlightened positions on Vietnam, Reaganism, hippies, drugs, protest, civil rights, the whole controversial works, and yet nothing seems to matter much when it has run through the *Chronicle*'s machine and come out as something like a report on the latter days of Pompeii by La Rochefoucauld as told to Milton Berle. (A rare mood of moral earnestness did come into the paper when some of its reporters were gleefully roughed up by the notorious Oakland cops at the recent antidraft riots.) The tone is set by gossip-columnist Herb Caen, the *Chronicle*'s liberal and brilliant Master of the Revels, who suspects himself of having dreamed the city into being and now sustains its existence with his witty, loving malice. No other provincial city could afford a columnist of Caen's talent, or would feel uneasy enough about itself to tolerate him. But while I read him every day and am always amused and impressed, he seems to me to represent perfectly the limiting nature of the San Francisco mood. He's afraid of no one, no pieties pertain, and this happy freedom ultimately forbids him to speak seriously and straight without seeming to lapse into the sentimentality he and this city fear above all else. When everything is funny, comic invention becomes its own object, and Caen really has no way of persuading you that his decent-minded feelings about the war or Reagan point anywhere except back to the whole indistinguishable comic mix that he finds his world to be. I take a rather old-fashioned view of this, of course.

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San Francisco, as it perfectly well knows, has all the equipment to be a cosmopolitan city except a native artistic life. There are of course the local rock groups, some — like the Jefferson Airplane and The Grateful Dead — excellent, but this is hardly a native mode, and the "San Francisco Sound" could as well have been the Omaha Sound if Omaha had chanced to have a warm climate, cheap housing and a tradition of putting up with odd behavior. "Serious" music means the Opera, admirable in the way Dr. Johnson said female preaching was, and the usual routine of second-class symphony orchestra and visiting firemen. Local art I know nothing about except that one gallery advertises (on TV, naturally) the works of "the great Cucaro, America's Picasso and our $50 Million Artist." There seem to be few interesting local writers, and apart from *Ramparts* and *Sunset* (those glossy counterparts — in California you either settle in or cut out, and both pay richly) no local publications of much worth, though devotees of the *Berkeley Barb* may want to disagree. There's lots of repertory theater, from the commercially ambitious American Conservatory Theatre ("But how many revivals of *Man and Superman* does one want to see?" asked a witty neighbor of ours) through a wide range of smaller enterprises which mostly do old Pinter or Ionesco or, for something new, *America Hurrah*. The only case I know of a theater sustained by its own creative imagination is the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a young, high-minded, less than professional but thoroughly charming company that's quite up to New York standards of political immediacy and moral license. (At the time of writing they're either in the East or in jail somewhere en route.) Even the night life is uninventive, once you tire of bare bosoms and female impersonators. A New York friend, when confronted with the spurious gaiety of North Beach after dark, could only mutter "But nothing's happening!" I'm afraid nothing much is, at least nothing that isn't also happening everywhere else.

Even the hippies are pretty quiet these days. Haight-Ashbury (I haven't been there) makes the papers for narcotics busts, public health disasters, an occasional murder, but George Romney and other tourists report it to be depressingly like any other slum, and even the hippies are said to be moving out, seeking in rural communes the peace and stability that squares seek in suburbs. Oneida Village, Brook Farm, the subsistence homesteads and Tugwellian green-belt towns of the early New Deal, Levittown, now hippie nests in the boondocks — the dream breeds true. One hippie group, panning for gold on the upper Sacramento River, is embroiled with the State, which wants to run a highway through their claim and can do so if the stake can be proved economically unprofitable.

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The hippies take out enough dust to keep them in bread and beans, which sounds like profit to me. At any rate, it's obscurely reassuring to imagine them all out there, in a landscape that can validate that cowboy style — from the mustachios and boots and faraway gaze down to the homemade cigarette.

But it isn't the hard-line (soft-shell?) hippies but rather the demi-hips, the crypto-hips, the hip-symps, that dominate the scene. And here there are some fine specimens of cultural cross-pollination. Shaggy heads and carefully raggy clothes in glistening Corvettes and Jaguars, in fancy bars and restaurants and good seats at the Opera, on the well-groomed campuses of rich suburban high schools and shopping centers. One gathers that a certain amount of pot is puffed behind ranch-house doors, though the traditionalists may still hold out for wife-swapping and polaroid parties. The most touching case for me was the teen-age boy I saw down the street, bearded and Jesus-coifed, throwing a tennis ball against his garage door and fielding it expertly and intently (no put-on here) with his very elaborate and professional first-baseman's mitt. Remembering fondly my own interior triumphs as DiMaggio and Mize, I wonder what fantasy was this? What crossing of dreams in that kingdom? Does the House of David still field a team? Do they count the gate inside the Gates of Eden?

Middle-aged, middle-class culture (how insistently those terms merge when social distinctions lose monetary bases, as in white America) centers here on politics, or rather on the scramble to *avoid* politics that is so distinctive of California. The take-over by hams and buffoons — George Murphy, Ronnie Reagan, Mrs. Shirley T. Black, the backstage counter-scurryings of such as Steve Allen and Robert Vaughn, even poor Bing Crosby, a somnolent campaigner for Mrs. Black who had to be bundled up from Palm Springs to get him registered in San Mateo County — all this expresses the urgent need to make politics fun to watch like TV, and like TV something that's safely inside the screen and so beyond one's own participation or responsibility. Reagan, looking drawn and ill and scared to death, commits daily blunders that would ruin him (or would they?) in Massachusetts or New Jersey or Ohio. He has gutted the state "Medi-Cal" program, allowing the *Chronicle* to run pictures of sick and bewildered old ladies being thrust bodily from private nursing homes and carted off to county hospitals, and moving even the medical associations to protest; he has proposed tuition for the University and State Colleges on which prosperous middle-class Californians have been free-loading for generations; he has cut support for mental health facilities to the bone (one meal a day for inmates, says the *Chronicle*), *raised* taxes and brought in the biggest budget in history,

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had a lot to say about citizens (i.e., Negroes) obeying the law (i.e., the Oakland cops), tried to give away the redwoods to the lumber companies — and the polls show only a modest drop in his popularity, in a state where nearly everyone is either old or sick or in college or insane or a fiscal troglodyte or Negro or a conservationist, and often most of these at once.

Politics here has become what we fear it is becoming everywhere, a play of images on the big screen we want to think public life is, quite divorced from issues and honest (or dishonest) self-interest. But they aren't true images. No one who really responds to images, appearances taken as clues to inner life, could *look* at Reagan and still support him. As I said, he looks awful, with the tense, purse-mouthed solemnity of the junior executive called in to make his first big presentation to the Board — none of the slick New Right skill one had expected and feared, none of the boyish warmth of his old juvenile roles, just pomposity and strain. If there is an issue here, it's Vietnam, which Reagan predictably meets with cries of escalation and "total victory." San Francisco has just voted on Proposition P, calling for American withdrawal without specifying conditions. No one expected it to win, and it didn't; there were lots of good, gray liberal consciences wrung out about the Extremeness of its language, and the *Chronicle*, whose distaste for the war is clear on most nonvoting days, editorially called for a "no" vote because passage of the measure might seem to create a "posture of defeat" whereas our aim should be withdrawal with "honor" — a word that Herb Caen's readers must have been a little startled by in such a connection. (The other papers of course took a firmly apocalyptic view of the whole idea.) But while it failed, the proposition got nearly 40% of the vote, vague and extreme as it may have been.

The war is of course abhorrent to the young and the radical, but practical skepticism and even some moral concern is creeping into older and more conventional minds too. In our neighborhood of engineers, junior businessmen and professional people, one hears little enough about it, and indeed this Peninsular suburb is heavily Republican and pretty conservative generally. War is money, certainly for the engineers and technicians and peripherally so for the media people and academicians who more or less oppose it. But Vietnam isn't just a political, economic, military idea in suburbia. It's also, or so I fancy, a center around which to arrange one's other concerns, particularly about the young and their rebelliousness.

People here seem apprehensive enough in general. Conversations are friendly but guarded and a little distracted, with the self-assertive

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bonhomie of stereotypical suburbians not much in evidence. I perhaps coarsely suppose that my quiet, withdrawn, tired-looking neighbors are heavily in debt and that they haven't wholly adjusted their Depression-formed consciences to such a condition. If life here is comfortable, it is also expensive. And much of the expense goes to appease the young — not just the overpriced ranch houses that provide entrée to good (and unintegrated) public schools and the sporty cars without which no middle-class California youth can survive adolescence, but also the mod clothes, the record-players, the guitars, the surfboards and tape-recorders and walkie-talkies that (in their parents' darkest moods of prophecy) they will carry off with them to Haight Street when the Big Drop Out comes at last.

At any rate, if Vietnam provides intellectuals with a rhetorical exercise that absorbs and purges other anxieties and guilts than the ones the war itself so amply justifies, there may be a middle-class parallel in a sense of parental inadequacy that feeds into unarticulated attitudes toward the war and the Scene generally. I imagine a tangle of associations something like this: the kids are unhappy, and the more we try to connect with them the unhappier they get; they get hung up on clothes, music, hair, Negroes, drugs, and none of these seem open to negotiation or even understanding; but Vietnam *is* understandable, and even squares can feel disturbed enough about waste and aimlessness of policy to make it a possible ground on which to approach the young with signs of agreement. If Vietnam were taken away, would the young be able to resist so intransigently on the issues that would remain? Would the adult world, which having absorbed the music and fashion of the young now shows at least some sign of trying to cope with the racial problem and even of beginning to apprehend the drug thing, maybe then seem a little less hopeless and alien? No one of course has said anything like this in my hearing, but my having made it up may not keep it from bearing some relation to the minds I'm talking about. (That they are undoubtedly kidding themselves is another matter.) I do know that people who turn apoplectic at the thought of long hair and drugs (which of course represent sexual license to the respectable imagination) often surprise me by offering no resistance to my own disgust about the war.

It will be obvious that I've described a California that isn't much different from the rest of America, climate and scenery excepted. California isn't a comic *lusus naturae*, it's rather the condition toward which America has always been tending, but with the virtue of being

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open and insistent about things that the rest of the country has preferred not to say out loud. It's the dream of liberation and flight articulated in concrete and then immobilized as the "freeways" turn to solid steel from dawn till midnight. It's the dream of noble human works in a noble landscape shrouded in smog that obliterates the landscape and smudges the works. It's the dream of progressive politics strangled by the human comfort it worked so long to create — those millions of people in little ranch houses who find themselves passing rich on seven or eight thousand a year and are damn well going to stay that way, niggers or no niggers. It's the dream of sexual freedom condensed to the wistful Sadean geometries that beckon from the want ads of the *Berkeley Barb*: "NEED MALE roommate discreet semi hip gay grad student with broad interest," "MALE WANTS 1 or 2 uninhibited girls 18 to 40 with big derrieres for sex who are fond of fr. and gr. cultures." "SEMI HIP GRAD, 26, tall slim hung OK clean no grass date similar. Also date liberal girl." Its the classless society where no one wears neckties and everyone drives a new car and the very rich, like the very poor, are safely hidden away in their ghettos, but built on a massive fault line and liable to crack open almost any day now. In short (while my rhetoric holds out), California is our secret fascination with pleasure, stripped of its celluloid collar and stovepipe hat, but it is also our damnable conviction that pleasure at best creates boredom and alienation, at worst instant death. The suicide rate in San Francisco is incredibly high; this was recently explained as what happens when you reach the end of the road, having used up the whole continent and found that nothing has really changed, but I guess we can go on assuming that the poor devils just were having too much fun to live.

But if the national fate, to say nothing of personal fates, doesn't seem much more hopeful here than elsewhere, it may seem a little clearer. If American politics is finally to be polarized into Right and Left, it begins here, as the Birchers and the New Left go about dismantling the old, misty political structures. If traditional "high" culture is finally to go under, it begins here in the as yet timorous affair between the Hollywood mass media and the new pop styles. If we are to have a social Armageddon, it may well begin here, where the cops are tougher, the governors more reckless, the militants more numerous and doctrinaire. If after all nothing is to happen, it will be because nothing's happening here. Nothing may be, but I shouldn't want to bet on it.

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# NOTES FROM GERMANY

"This countryside is too romantic; I can't take it," said Wolfgang Hildesheimer to Günter Eich as they walked over the wooden bridge to the Pulvermühle (Powder Mill), a big barn of an inn hidden away among the rocky woodlands of Franconia. It was here that Wackenroder walked with Tieck 175 years ago. Their conversations, later recorded in letters, are among the first documents of German Romanticism. And it was here that Group 47, who met in 1966 at Princeton, New Jersey, and the year before at Sigtuna, Sweden, was holding its twentieth anniversary meeting.

Hildesheimer's remark could be taken as a barometric reading of the "Kahlschlag" (starting from scratch) generation's attitude of rejection of the whole German romantic movement, a reaction which is to be understood politically as well as aesthetically. Just how far German literature has moved from the emotionalism and irrationalism of that movement, and from the dire excesses to which they led, could not be better measured than on the texts that were read at the Pulvermühle during the three-day Group session.

The procedure today is the same as it was twenty years ago. Hans Werner Richter, Group initiator and presiding officer, calls on writers who have brought along manuscripts to read. (Suggestions about readings can be made by other Group authors, publishing-house editors, or the writers themselves can apply to Richter directly.) There is no priority in the selection and no one knows in advance who will be called on to read. All texts read at the sessions must be unpublished.

After each reading (roughly 10-20 minutes) there follows a period of discussion (roughly ½ to ¾ hour). The Group's Golden Rule is that the author himself is allowed no further word. Texts are supposed to be judged on the basis of literary merit alone. For one thing, how close do they come to the authors' own intention. The Group does not represent any literary "school" — its most representative members have virtually nothing in common stylistically — yet at the end of any given three-day session certain marked trends are apparent, and looking back over the

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past twenty years of German literature, one can fairly say that every stylistic novum has had its spokesman, if not in fact its originator, here.

Very often the most perceptive criticisms come from other authors. Günter Grass and Martin Walser not only listen with an almost voracious attentiveness, they are among the most critically articulate members of the Group. Immediate, spontaneous criticism is an art in itself, and while one can admire the brilliance of formulation and the seeming sureness of these quick judgments, the dangers are all too evident.

The first day's readings were almost as depressing as the Princeton crop. Reinhard Lettau coined the phrase "Mutmassung Stil" (Let's suppose . . .) to describe the most frequently used technique. One could equally have termed it "Gantenbein Style" — it is the closest Germany has come to the antinovel, although qualitatively it rarely measures up to its French model. In the hands of a mediocre craftsman, it is tedious beyond words — endless details and speculations linked together in a purely additive fashion.

By far the most striking (in a two-fold sense, both visually and acoustically) reading was given by the red-haired, Lilith-eyed Renate Rasp. Miss Rasp has just completed her first novel, a nightmare tale of the misguided efforts of the parents of a child raised as a tree. One thinks of Arcimboldo, or of Alfred Kubin at his most gruesome. What Miss Rasp read was poetry of obsession, at times confession, but always objectivized and always cut down in statement to a bare minimum. The "alienation" effect is achieved mainly through an uncompromising use of infinitive constructions. It is a curious coincidence that Miss Rasp shares so many obsessions with the late Sylvia Plath. Her brothel for women with mechanical dolls instead of men recalls "The Applicants"; her white meat on the butcher's board makes one think of "I am red meat"; and even her poem about insatiability recalls Plath's "And I eat men like air."

In a poem about a village exhibitionist, Miss Rasp achieves a dazzling effect by juxtaposing the horror of his long dangling penis, by which the village children pull him around the yard, with his aura of respectability — indeed by making him the very emblem of cleanliness: he is the owner of two laundries.

This was the starkest, most uncompromising verse heard in these parts in a long time. Miss Rasp's debut at the Group was celebrated as the sensation it was. Whether her range will prove as broad as her themes are intense seemed doubtful even to the most enthusiastic critics. But obsession is by definition exclusive.

The Prize of The Group 47 was awarded to Jürgen Becker for readings from a new work called "Ränder" (*Margins*). Becker has read at the Group before, with varying response. Three years ago he received

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high praise for a work called "Felder" (*Areas*); last year he was censured sharply for presenting a fashionable pop-text. The prose read at the Pulvermühle was regarded as a continuation of "Areas," only much improved technically, and with a broader, no longer provincial, scope. Becker has just returned from a two-year fellowship stay in Rome.

As his titles indicate, Becker works in abstract fields (or as Enzensberger called them, "magnetic fields"), removing colloquial expressions, slogans, small talk, from their context, and arranging them in such a way as to show how they cancel each other out, how they are ultimately absurd. Grass described this technique as "Benennung-Aufhebung Dialektik" (designate-revoke). Someone else called Becker's protocol of consciousness "Bewusstseins-Realismus," and so, if nothing else, the terms for new tendencies, the arrows for new directions (add to these Lettau's "Mutmassung-Stil") were provided at this session.

Humor still seems to be suspect in the high courts of German literature. That this is so could be seen in the reaction to the short prose pieces read by Günter Eich. Eich's last volume of poetry, "Anlässe und Steingarten," came out about a year ago, just as Eich turned sixty.

Over the years the poet's progress has been marked by an agonized struggle to "wring speech out of silence." What a surprise then to find Eich jesting, indulging in what were termed "private jokes," dancing a jig in his own mausoleum! Readers of his last volume, as well as "Drei Prosastücke," printed in *Die Neue Rundschau*, Winter, 1966, should be less astonished.

Resignation was never a pose with Eich. Why shouldn't he cast it off, or rather, cast it aside temporarily; particularly, one might add, when it has become so fashionable? "I have never," writes the father of the *Kahlschlag* poetry, "been avant-garde. I have always moved sideways."

Group 47 is constantly under attack for lacking political courage, for already belonging to the Establishment (which Establishment?), as well as for all the opposite reasons. During one of the afternoon sessions, the Pulvermühle was approached by a crowd of hippie students (some of them drove up in their brand-new Jaguars) from the SDS (Students for Social Democracy) of Erlangen University. They shouted and flaunted banners, lambasting the Group for failing to take action against the Springer Concern, Germany's Hearst mammoth that controls more than one-third of the country's press. Little did they know that in the early hours of that same morning a resolution had been drawn up, pledging the undersigned to desist from contributing to Springer papers, and appealing to members of PEN as well as to independent writers and scholars all over the country to follow suit.

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One more meaningless resolution? In a country where intellectuals were once silent too long, even a gesture of watchfulness must be applauded.

If one can imagine a Schiller without the poetry, a Shaw without the wit, then possibly one can see what the critics were driving at when they called on those venerables by way of praising Rolf Hochhuth's new play, *Soldaten*. (World premiere was in Berlin, October 9.) But it is almost impossible to discuss the artistic merits of this play (a play which raised more dust before it even reached the stage than possibly any other drama in recent years) before considering its historical thesis.

Hochhuth wanted to write a play about the senselessness and brutality of air war, a plea for an extension of the Geneva Convention to include air war. In the course of his research, he became more and more absorbed in the figure of Churchill, his role in the bombing of Dresden and his *alleged* role in the death of General Sikorski.

The Polish Prime Minister was agitating bitterly for action against Stalin. Churchill feared that antagonizing Stalin might bring about a separate peace between Hitler and Stalin. Sikorski remained adamant. Then, in July, 1943, Sikorski was killed when his plane crashed off Gibraltar. The accuracy, or even credibility, of the thesis — that Churchill planned the death of Sikorski, indeed that he had no alternative in view of his ultimate goal — is, first of all, a matter for historians.

Hochhuth collaborated in his research on the Sikorski Affair with David Irving, whose book, *Accident: The Death of a General*, came out in England the very week *Soldaten* saw its first performance in Berlin. In his review of Irving's book for *The Observer*, A. J. P. Taylor had the following to say: "Sikorski was not the principal obstacle in the way of Soviet-Polish agreement. On the contrary, he was the best hope for the agreement, and his death, which strengthened the Polish Right Wing in exile, was a disaster for the British policy of conciliation. Churchill would have been foolish as well as wicked if he had planned Sikorski's death."

But why not take the legend as legend and move on to the play itself? Is it mere wincing at a cherished image defiled? In a letter to *Encounter* — *Soldaten* was banned in Britain — Leo Labedz writes: "Once upon a time a legend was a legend, a myth a myth, and all historical uncertainties were in fact legitimate subjects for playwrights' dramatic reinterpretations. But what was legitimate for Shakespeare is not legitimate for Hochhuth. Why? Because in our time he is not just dealing with different versions of what he and his viewers *may* regard as possible historical truth, but with a deliberate falsification of history." One cannot substitute psychology for fact, nor deduce the deed from the

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motive (a technique very similar to Barbara Garson's in "MacBird"). It is not so much a cherished image which is violated as history itself.

Since Hochhuth's purpose is moral, didactic, it seems only fair to judge him on his own precepts. One has the right to ask whether it is morally permissible for him to make any use he chooses of history, even if one grants the nobleness of his purpose.

It is unfortunate that both Goebbels and Stalin subscribed to Hochhuth's theory of Churchill's guilt in the Sikorski Affair. Could this explain Hochhuth's reluctance to be confronted with German sources, his boast that he used only Allied material? Why all the fuss? Why didn't he use German sources as well?

And does not a far deeper error lie at the base of Hochhuth's thinking? In attributing historical events exclusively to individuals, he ignores the totality of those events, the complicated processes which led up to them. This "subjectivizing" of history, while conceivably fruitful for the dramatic process, is at best not very good history.

In an open letter to Rolf Hochhuth, Theodor Adorno wrote: "Everywhere events are personalized, anonymous connections that are no longer comprehensible to the theoretically untrained mind and whose hellish coldness are no longer endurable to the anxiety-ridden mind, are chalked up to individuals, in order to rescue what one can of spontaneous action. The realistic theater which you call for, and the absurd, may actually, as seems to be the case with yourself, converge. But in order for this to be successful, it takes a Guernica painting or Schönberg's "Überlebenden von Warschau" (Survivors of Warsaw). No traditional dramatic form based on actors with leading roles can do the job. The absurdity of the Real presses in upon the form, shattering the realistic façade."

Had Hochhuth, despite all theoretical objections, succeeded in writing a gripping drama, one might be obliged to say, the more power to him. Fortunately (unfortunately?) this is not the case.

For the play itself, Hochhuth obviously needed something concrete on which to hang his treatise. But not only was his choice poor this time, his dramatic talents failed him as well, and not the least of his failures was a failure of language.

Seen in a broader light, the failure of *Soldaten*, finally, has brought the crisis, latent in documentary theater from the start, to a head. Even of Peter Weiss, its most successful exponent, it must be said that he succeeds in spite of, rather than because of, the form. But *Soldaten* makes the point with finality: this is a dead-end road.

**Betty Falkenberg**

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## CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

### FLORIDA FIGHTING MOTORCYCLE GANG

WEST PALM BEACH, FLA., Nov. 18 — Florida law enforcement officials have begun a crackdown on a nomadic gang of motorcycle riders called the Outlaws, whose members are being investigated in connection with a variety of crimes in Florida and other states.

The enforcement effort is centered in Palm Beach County, where 18-year-old Christine Deese of West Palm Beach complained last week that male members of the Outlaws had nailed her to a tree by driving four-inch nails through her hands. Miss Deese, a member of the gang, said she was being punished for disobeying orders.

When he learned of the incident, Gov. Claude R. Kirk Jr. threatened to drive the Outlaws out of the state within 30 days.

"This is one of the many vulgar acts this group has done," Governor Kirk said.

(*New York Times,* November 19, 1967). Contributed by Charles Douglas, Rochester, New York.

### SEE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

[Some] critics believe that the psychological impact of orbiting bombs or sub-orbital warheads that can evade all but the newest radar detection systems is too great to be ignored.

There was some speculation here tonight that the Pentagon is offering the new vehicle as its own "terror weapon" to counter talk of the fractional orbital system.

(*New York Times,* December 14, 1967.)

### DEATH PENALTY CONSTITUTIONAL

LOS ANGELES (AP) — . . . Advocating capital punishment as a deterrent to crime, [Deputy Dist. Atty. J. Miller] Leavy said: "I am satisfied any Godfearing man who knows he might go to his death for a crime is going to be deterred. However, many persons are not Godfearing."

(*The Daily Californian,* November 28, 1967.) Contributed by R. S. Becker, San Mateo, California.

### U.S. SAID TO PRESS SHARPLY FOR GOOD VIETNAM REPORTS

SAIGON, South Vietnam, December 31 — American officials at almost all levels, both in Saigon and in the provinces, say they are under steadily increasing pressure from Washington to produce convincing evidence of progress, especially by the South Vietnamese, in the next few months.

"What it all adds up to," an officer in the American Embassy said, "is a simple, straight-forward message: Washington is telling us that the American people will no longer tolerate the Vietnamese caring less about winning than we do."

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Probably without authorization from Washington, a number of middle-level officials have told their subordinates to try to head off newspaper articles that reflect adversely on the [Saigon] Government's commitment to the war — not by lying, but by presenting what they call "the genuine elements of Government progress."

Field representatives say that they have not been ordered to falsify figures or to pull punches in reports. In fact, they add, they have been encouraged to be as candid as possible, as long as they do so through confidential official channels.
(*New York Times*, January 1, 1968.)

## CHURCHES URGED TO RETURN TO SUPERNATURALISM

(*New York Times*, October 7, 1967.) Contributed by William Boardman, New York, New York.

## TUNISIAN OFFICIAL SCORES ARAB INFORMATION MEDIA

TUNIS, September 28 (Agence France-Presse) — The Tunisian Secretary of State for Information said yesterday that "verbal excess" had become so great in Arab information media that "no one any longer pays more than relative attention to what we have to say."
(*New York Times*, September 29, 1967.) Contributed by D. Justice, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## VIETCONG FAIL TO STOP WORK OF 4-H CLUBS, LEADER SAYS

CHICAGO, November 26 (AP) — The work of 4-H clubs in South Vietnam has not been stopped by terrorism, the national 4-H leader in that country said today.

"They [the Vietcong] like to attack at night. They kidnap and kill our 4-H leaders. They mine our roads. My own car has bullet holes in it. But they do not stop us," Vo Quang Tam said.

He spoke at the national 4-H club congress.

"The 4-H boys and girls we train now will help rebuild Vietnam when the slaughter stops," he said.
(*New York Times*, November 27, 1967.) Contributed by Joseph Masi, Port Chester, New York.

## INCREASE IN CHASTITY

TORONTO — Applications submitted by coeds to the unofficial computer dating center at the University of Toronto indicated yesterday that the virginity rate at the university has increased 20 per cent in the past year.

Computer engineer John Pullam said 80 per cent of the feminine applicants claimed virginity this year, compared to 60 per cent last year.
(*San Francisco Chronicle.*) Contributed by Mrs. Margaret Rowe, San Francisco, California.

EDITORS' NOTE: *We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to* PR *will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the latecomers.*

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# BOOKS

## BLACKLASH

**THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER. By William Styron. Random House. $6.95.**

"I don't know what to tell my son when he goes off to school. It may be different for the colored man up North, or even over in New Orleans and the big cities like that, but out here it's Mississippi, with only the fields here and the store and the sheriff here, and you know when they don't like what a colored man does, they just goes and takes matters into their own hands.

"My boy, he's doing something real different. I don't know how it come about. Not with my help, anyway. He's marching, that one is. They signed him up to march. Some one did, out of Jackson, I think. A civil rights man. He got my boy's ear. He told him that we're still slaves — and I can't deny it — and we shouldn't be. Well, of course, I agree there, too. We're not supposed to be slaves no more; and that was to be gone a long time ago, my daddy told me. His daddy, he was the son of one, but he was supposed to be the last one, though I can't really see what difference it makes, to call us a slave or not. We live the same way, and it doesn't make any difference what the name of us is.

"But my boy, he's all fired up. They got him to be like that. They kept on telling him things, about how bad it is, and how we've got to go get things for ourselves, the colored man, and stand up to the white people, stand up real strong. Well, that was a lot of wild talking, that's what I thought. But they came and said we could have our kids go to the white school, and things like that, if we wanted, and all we had to do was *petition* them, *petition* the white people and they'd go along.

"That's the biggest piece of foolishness I'd ever heard, when I heard it. First I thought my boy was pulling a big joke on me, but then I decided it was himself he was fooling — because he kept on saying, 'I'm going, Daddy,' and 'I'm going, Daddy,' until I thought he was in bad trouble, yes sir, real bad trouble, in his head.

"But his mother, she sided with him, and she said yes, he should

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go. And I thought the end of the world was coming, because sure as anything they'll come in the night and kill us, be it with dynamite or bullets or a fire that burns us down so fast we couldn't figure which fire it was, the one here or the one in Hell. And if we tried to escape, they'd be waiting for us up the road, guns pointing, like always, you know.

"Well, the next thing that happened was It. My boy — he's fourteen — he just walked off one day, right from this house here, with everyone watching us real close, not only him but us, too. They were lawyers and the news people, and they told me there were government people, the F.B.I. from up in Washington come, and they were to stand by, in case of trouble. And the next thing I knew, there was our James walking out of here, and he marched his way right into the school and sat there, with all those white kids, and God knows how he come out of it alive, and the fact that he's still alive today — well, I can't explain it, I'll have to admit. Because I thought they'd kill him, right on the spot, as soon as his black feet stepped inside of that white school, and no matter how many people were there to watch him and protect him. And to this minute, I hold my breath in talking of it all. Because the white man, he'll kill a nigger when he can, even for no reason, you see — just that he *wants* to; and my boy, he gave them a real good reason. But so far, they're holding their guns, and maybe waiting until the moment is quiet, and they'll strike. I fear they will. I believe they will. I do. And when they do, you know, they'll kill more than one — maybe the whole family, for all you can know. They don't stop until they figure they've drawn all the blood they need, and then we know that it's no use provoking them, not on this earth."

Those words were spoken in the autumn of 1965, well over a century since Nat Turner led his short-lived revolt and died by hanging; and presumably at a time when William Styron was writing *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, an unforgettable book, a feverish, convincing, redemptive book, a book by a contemporary American novelist that will be read and valued for generations. As I read Styron's novel I kept on thinking of that youth and his family. For years I spent time in Little Rock, in New Orleans, in Clinton, Tennessee, in Atlanta — but I have never seen anything to match what the man quoted above had to face: his son was not marching down a city's streets, in the company of others; nor could the youth fall back on the support of a Negro community, poor but massed together and somewhat able to defend itself. They were way out in the country, the father, the mother and their children; they were "sitting ducks," as they put it, sharecroppers who lived in Mississippi, virtual slaves, barely alive in isolated territory that may well be as dangerous

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for the "uppity" Negro even now as Nat Turner's Virginia ever was. When I watched that man say goodbye to his son I wondered what he could possibly be thinking. I saw the mixed pride and terror in his eyes and I heard him resort to history, just as "we" do in the most desperate of moments, just as Styron does in his novel; but I never quite dared imagine all that went through his mind — in contrast, that is, to what he was willing to say, and say to the likes of me. (Perhaps one day psychiatrists will realize that a lot more goes on in the mind than even willing and talkative patients can convey, *or* their doctors can comprehend and formulate, even by resort to such catch-all terms as the "unconscious," that large, rambling and convenient house which presumably shelters everything not spoken or remembered.)

And the son, what could I "make" of the son? What was "going on" in his mind as he took himself and his race into that white, rural, Mississippi school, in that hard-core segregationist county, with its active, powerful Klan? One of the first things the son did tell me had to do with members of the Klan. They were all about, he was told by a white boy in the locker room, and they meant business. They had their executions, and their next target was obvious. They would one day appear out of nowhere, a "healthy number" of them. So, the Negro boy told me what the white boy told him: "There are a healthy number of Klan people hereabouts." He spoke in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice.

He was too old for me to rely on drawings — paintings — as I do with young children when I want to get an idea of at least some of the things that pass through their minds. He was too shy, too reserved, too dignified for me to ask him direct questions. (Not all reluctance, even on the part of a self-declared patient, need be called "resistance" — by hungry listeners, psychiatrists who all too often want merely to hear confirmed what they already claim to know.)

So, at that time, I tried to *imagine* what was alive in the mind of that rather old child, that young man who one moment made me feel childish — not to mention excluded, ashamed and useless — and another moment seemed as open and direct and captivating as Wordsworth thought a "boy" of his age should still be. By that time I knew all the *conflicts* he had — psychological, social, the lot — and I knew the *defenses* he had or would soon be required to build, and I had some idea of what he was *thinking*, because I had asked many other Negro children what they had in mind when, say, they walked past a fierce mob on their way to an American school. I have never really known how to pull it all together, though — the conflicts, the defenses, the thoughts, the social and economic "background," the particular family's "goals." There is something more going on in the father and the son I have

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described here than a mind like mine, looking for what it is looking for, can really fathom. Psychiatrists are always on their way down, plumbing this or that depth; they don't quite know what to do with someone who is kicking *his* way *up*, fighting his way to the surface for air and rescue, for freedom, a word used possessively and cheaply in America to describe what white men obtained for themselves and denied to all others — Indians, Negroes, Mexicans.

I suppose it is true that William Styron has also tried to understand and give expression to the "innermost" feelings of a slave, and by extension the "real" Negro the rest of us simply fail to acknowledge or comprehend. In fact, it is a little sad to read some of the good and bad things said of his new novel, particularly the comments that dwell upon its psychological accuracy or deplore its historical failures. We hear that Styron has done the miraculous, transcended race, time and class to reach Nat Turner's "mind" and put its worst preoccupations and most noble moments to print. We hear that Styron has shown himself just another bourgeois writer: he makes something special and different out of Nat and out of one revolt among many; and he refuses Negroes their *general* anger and discontent, in the face of which the South inevitably had to be harsh and repressive (and was, *before* Nat Turner's rebellion).

And finally, we are told that Nat is simply not believable: the language is obviously Styron's, Styron straining hard rather than Nat talking naturally. Approved or disapproved as if it were a piece of research written by a social scientist — its *psychology* is good, its sense of *history* and its *sociology* or *anthropology* excellent or questionable — this is in fact a novel written by one of our best contemporary novelists. Styron either comes off knowing the virtually unknowable — for a white man; or he is told that he needs to know nineteenth-century society much better, needs a few "field trips," needs to pick up more of the Negro's dialect (which he actually uses to great effect) and then draw on *it*, rather than his own voice and style of expression. Styron himself makes it very clear that he is trying to write a "meditation on history." There is nothing evasive or sly about the expression; it tells as much or as little as the word "novel" does. Perhaps the author could not simply assume the integrity and validity of his own novel because he lives in our time, when old-fashioned literary critics are less menacing than their more "objective" successors, who have all those new "methodological tools" to fall back upon.

On New Year's Day, 1967, in Roxbury, Connecticut, Styron must have known "deep down" as he wrote his "Author's Note" that he would be called before Freud, or Marx, or Stanley Elkins, or Frederick Law Olmstead, or Malinowski or C. Wright Mills — even as Oscar Lewis is

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asked to read more B. F. Skinner, more Lukács, and become more "quantitative," less "qualitative" and more "historical"; and Freud is called a poor sociologist who never knew what Durkheim or Weber did. Again and again we choose to ignore exactly what a given man is doing, and when and where, and in the face of what professional resistance or prejudice. As critics we also refuse to invoke the most obvious and pertinent standards; and for Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* those standards have to do with the novel's success or failure as a work of the writer's imagination.

I think Styron has written an enduring book. He captures a whole region, the speech, the beautiful land, the moody weather and everywhere the open black fear and the white fear that masquerades as edgy pride. Whatever its historical merits, I think the book will *make* history, be a part of our history. Like Faulkner, Styron will not let up on the reader. He has some of Faulkner's passionate, withering power, and like him he is a Southerner, brought up on talk, on stories and on the region's calculated and desperate ambiguity. I do not see how anyone — regardless of race — can ever be the same again after reading his novel, after reading what the facts known about Nat Turner did to and brought out from the mind of William Styron. For me the book made the sharecropper quoted above become more "real," more of a "person." That is the point — and the irony — of what a writer can do. The sharecropper *is* real, *is* a person to me. God knows I have seen him often enough. Yet, when I recently went to see him again, with Styron's Nat in mind, something seemed different. The sharecropper's "life," his words and eyes and gestures became Nat's, and in a flash I felt myself "seeing" and "feeling" more than I could before. I suppose I could say that Styron's writing made me newly and gratefully impressionable, and as a result more broadly observant.

The obvious simplicity of the novel's plot binds together all sorts of complicated and tortuous "inner" events. Nat Turner has been caught after an abortive but striking, persistent and fearful rebellion. In Styron's book Nat sits in jail awaiting execution and speaks and speaks and speaks; and dreams and remembers and meditates and wonders and listens. In a few days he will be dead and the novel about his life and spirit over. Nat's listening is particularly important. Styron wants to bring Nat alive, make him seethe and cower, but as a writer Styron knows that the most private and withdrawn person lives with others, even if they populate an imaginary world of dreams and fantasies. And as a Southerner Styron knows that slavery or no slavery the region's twin distinctions have been its willingness to exploit the Negro ruthlessly and live beside him in fitful and peculiar closeness. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* conveys more than

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a believable, distinguished Negro, a would-be leader who never had a chance once he started himself and others marching; the book captures beautifully the "thing" that goes on between black and white — particularly the more educated of both races — in Virginia or Alabama or Louisiana. Perhaps a tentative generalization might be in order: Southern writers of whatever color are particularly sensitive to the terrible and humorous and impossible "goings-on" between men and women and children of both races; Northern writers who are Negro or white go deep into themselves, and even into the skins of "others," but somehow fail to capture much that happens *between* people whose racial differences mean so much to one another. Perhaps it is simply that not much *does* go on between whites and blacks in New York or Chicago. Or rather, they hate and fear one another, pure and simple, but as Baldwin has said, they don't "know" one another. Ellison's "invisible man" nevertheless had all sorts of palpable, sad, comic and ironic dealings with white men in the South; and Ellison knows that social customs and habits, no matter how formal, constrained or abusive, are not without their "deeper" or "inner" (read "psychological" today) significance. Like Ellison, Styron manages to catch the twisted intimacy that Southerners of both races live out — and Southern writers portray.

So Styron has wedded his voice, his personal experience, his generous heart to Nat's yearning, suffering, gifted life. In so doing he succeeds in making Nat a particular human being and a particular Negro, and thereby affirms himself a novelist who wants to enter the world with whatever sensibility he can summon. Yes, I find it all "valid": Nat's experiences with Negroes and whites, his memories of growing up, his various moods and "attitudes," his biblical rage and biblical resignation, his uncanny restraint as a commander-in-chief and his murderous vengeance — singly delivered upon Margaret, the white woman who came nearest him and drew him furthest from himself and his awful circumstances. But I do not believe it is the "validity" or the historical "accuracy" of *The Confessions of Nat Turner* that count all that much. William Styron has written words that will push hard at thousands and thousands of minds. He has awakened us, made us feel more and in that way given us a rather special glimmer of that elusive thing called "history" and that terribly concrete thing called "race." Following the tradition of writers like Faulkner and Tolstoy, he has made a bold and successful attempt to follow them quite directly — not by writing "responsibly" about a social issue, or writing "profoundly" about a psychological one, but by writing a haunting and luminous novel that incidentally breathes history and psychology and whatever on every page.

**Robert Coles**

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## GOOD-BYE BROADWAY

**LOST NEW YORK. By Nathan Silver. Houghton Mifflin. $15.00.**

Mr. Silver's beautiful and appalling volume embraces several books at once, and they are all sad. From England, where everybody is very busy these days tarting up, with new colored paint and curatorial polish, just the kinds and vintage of building that have shrunk into the shadows of Mr. Silver's black-and-white photographs, they look even sadder. As a sentimental antiquarian album that might have been prepared by any town's historical society, it is a kind of grim joke: these are pictures of what isn't there — they are like a text that consists only of the list of its errata. As a topographical history of the past three hundred years, it reads variously like Minoan archaeology and Renaissance poetical tears over the wreckage of Rome. As a plea for the preservation of what has made American city life visually memorable, it appears with tragic cogency at a moment when The City (with its problems) has leaped off the Audenesque poet's page into the sleazy conceptual apparatus of the political hack. In many ways, this almost medieval, *ubi sunt* lament for the subjects of a couple of hundred pictures speaks to some of the immediate crises of civilization itself — the failure of unfulfilled technology to do any more than drive wedges, anxiously, between planning and memory, beauty and health. But there is more to it than that.

*"Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel)" — the old Paris is gone; a city's shape changes more quickly than a human heart.* There is, of course, the basic technological problem of the voracity of the new; partially because of sheer land shrinkage, new urban buildings cannot seem to coexist, in America, with their ancestors. All of this makes one want to leap wildly off into visionary geopolitics: the surface of the planet is shrinking; the biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply needs instant and heroic allegorization lest it become a sick joke; the genuine historic city, like some of the tradition of manliness itself, is in crisis in an economy of abundance that is really a very badly packed cornucopia. And so forth. But there are even more visionary questions raised by *Lost New York*, and neither the pious avowals with which it has been praised, nor the pointless and ridiculous carping of one reviewer who questions the

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validity of the book because he personally didn't like Pennsylvania Station, etc., seem concerned with them.

These pictures of buildings in New York City that have been torn down are accompanied by well-documented running commentary and an introduction which sketches out something of the planning and building history of New York. It concludes with a preliminary discussion of some of the legal and economic factors that have stood in the way both of preservation of individual structures as monuments, and of what the author sees as the larger problem of conservation, i.e., the cultivation of historical continuity in cities through arrangements of use rather than merely museumlike encapsulation of the good old places. The photographs themselves are wonderful, not only because the spectacle of ruins and of fantastic landscape always breeds visions, but because of the peculiar historical appropriateness of the appearance of the book: these are all black-and-white photographs, primarily because most of them were taken from before the age of brilliant and sophisticated color photography. In any event, they are the color of certain kinds of memory for us, and it is no accident that, turning through these pages, we are confronted with all sorts of ghosts. Not the mildest of these are those specters of buildings actually still standing — the para-Ansonias and ghost-Dakotas — that loom up on the page before a closer inspection reveals that they are indeed other, lost structures. But of course they are specters because our sentimental gaze makes them so, and here, too, we are led back into more elusive questions, surely, than those of planning.

For not only do buildings change their appearance with the decay of time, with the change of the uses that urban life makes of them, with the changes in the landscape around them; the way they look changes with the kind of concern with which even the most devoted eye will pass over them. The mere contemplation of ruins, with subsequent inevitable moralizing, is a fairly simple thing. The later, eighteenth-century sort of contemplation of the drained village and the clogging urban sewer is a more complicated imaginative matter, in that while the observer's distance from the picture may be the same as in the previous case, he views the relics of an earlier way of life with a sadness not untinged with a disgust for what the very objects of the village, the buildings, the *places where* this and that happened, etc., have in fact become. William Cowper ruefully observes, with perhaps a touch of *Schadenfreude,* that (a favorite poplar grove having been hewn down) ". . . this tree is my seat that once lent me its shade." But after Romantic vision taught ways of mapping autobiography onto the contours of urban and rural change, the particular viewing eye's tendency to humanize the scene adds other complications.

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So then Baudelaire's second phase of lament over his changing city, after a remembered vision of crippled imagination in the trapped, ruined swan has led him to something beyond sentiment:

> *Paris change! mais rien de ma mélancolie*
> *N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,*
> *Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,*
> *Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.*

— *Paris is changing, but his melancholy is immutable; all the new buildings, scaffoldings, blocks of masonry, the old suburbs, all become allegorical, and his remembrances heavier than rocks.* The new and the old per se, and the prospects wherein they overlap, become charged with significance, and it is only a short move from this to the final complications of the modern surveying eye. Our own problem is that we see without any innocence either of vision or of heart; structures are not merely beautiful because of personal archaeology, nor Ugly but Important (a matter of Art History). These categories have become intricately involved with each other, and we have all seen the phasing in and out of particular kinds of decorative beauty that comes with learned observation. It took less than thirty years for the almost emblematic red brick, mansard-roofed "Victorian" house to stop looking ugly and ridiculous; but neither this brief time, nor the fact that the pleasure we take in the elevation and some of the details is not unconnected with the knowledge we have of the generous kinds of space within, can serve to make our sense of the exterior less authentic. Nevertheless, the kind of planning decision that asks for an unequivocal reply to questions like "*Is* this Important (Beautiful, truly, etc.) or not? Now, please: Time is Money" implicitly seems to demand simple criteria.

In any event, old buildings become ugly at about the same time as (if not because) they start to be unloved. Conversely, the deep and yet sophisticated responses to changes and the fact of change can cause subtle modulations. Consider, for example, a moralized landscape of New York around the turn of the century.

> And in the background a multitude of buildings, of pitiless hues and sternly high, were to him emblematic of a nation forcing its regal head into the clouds, throwing no downward glances; in the sublimity of its aspiration ignoring the wretches who may flounder at its feet. The roar of the city in his ear was to him the refrain of strange tongues, babbling heedlessly: it was the clink of coin, the voice of the city's hopes, which were to him no hopes.

Stephen Crane's menacing skyline, as we reconstruct it from Mr. Silver's

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pictures, would read to us like something lovelier and more tranquil. We would save the allegory of aspiration for our reading of the stepped motifs, both schematic and decorative, that emerge from the classic twenties and thirties New York setback pattern. (I suppose that the received emblematic reading of the glass-skinned box of the fifties and after is *reduction*: the myth of the graph, which Saul Steinberg first pointed out with his office-building elevation drawn on quadrille paper; the fact that the box-buildings look like schematic models of zoning patterns thrown up by one stage in a design process, and so forth. And putting *people* into a *graph* is inhuman, as we all know.)

*Lost New York* is an important book for many reasons, and so far I have been suggesting primarily that it is an aid to meditation, a way in to confrontation of the city as living monument, as a museum whose galleries are its regions and districts — a museum not without walls, but outside them ("without" in the older sense, perhaps). To cultivate the proper growth of the palimpsestic city should be one of the aims of civilization, and planning is the only way to achieve that cultivation. The kind of discussion of these matters which generally prevails tends to break down into unnecessarily crude antagonisms between the planned and the random, with as many ruthless builders rallying under the latter device as sentimentalists. We have just begun to do imaginative work on the questions of what we like when we see 1) an old building, or 2) a picture of an old building. New York has not begun to brighten up some of the museum pieces (with the exception of bits of Central Park), on the order of London's painting the Albert Bridge in gay colors or doing up the interior of the dome on the British Museum's reading room.

Neither, of course, has New York yet faced the kind of planning crisis which has occurred over the fairly unambiguous question of the Martin-Wilson addition to the British Museum itself, where the most committed of New York City preservationists would probably be on the side of the demolition and expansion, and not merely because of an archaeological consolation or two (e.g., opening up a really good view of a fine Hawksmoor church in exchange for an indubitably Nash house). This is a very different kind of question from the debate over the Metropolitan Opera House, in any event. But with visual documentation of this sort, all kinds of questions can be raised. Is the sense of loss perhaps an integral part of the American urban experience? My father told me of the Hippodrome (for years, I think, one of the archetypal "it ain't there any more" reference points); I tell my four-year-old daughter of Penn Station. And so on? And there is, too, the terrifying memory of the beauty of that same structure in its death agonies, when for a brief time the supposed derivational likeness to the Baths of

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Caracalla became fulfilled as those vast columns lay about in ruins, the great roof open to the night sky.

Mr. Silver includes in his collection pictures of all sorts of buildings which had to disappear for very good reason. Everybody who is old enough may miss in it some favorite image, while yet having mixed feelings about the substance of the elusive shadow. I think of the Third Avenue El, for example; the book has a good shot of a stretch of the Bowery, but none of those amazing double-storied and occasionally crocketted-and-finialed express stations, with their looping rise and fall of track. Perhaps if the El hadn't gone, pushing people off it might have been a popular juvenile sport of the early sixties. And of course, being grateful for such kinds of small favor is a measure of the desperation of some aspects of hope for city life. It is only what happens to those hopes which will determine whether this book of pictures is to have been anything more than an illuminated *memento mori.*

**John Hollander**

## IN DEFENSE OF ORDER

**THE SENSE OF AN ENDING: Studies in the Theory of Fiction. By Frank Kermode. Oxford University Press. $5.75.**

Not many years ago, R. P. Blackmur, writing of James, reminded his readers that "the criticism of the novel . . . has yet to reach maturity — a lack here sorely felt; and a lack you will feel for yourselves if you will think of the relatively much greater maturity of the criticism of poetry." In *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode undertakes to meet this lack, one of the few attempts in English to outline a general theory of fiction that might serve as the basis for a more mature criticism of the novel. Kermode is concerned with "fiction" in its most "radical" form, in a sense that he illustrates — to take three random examples — from Richards, Wallace Stevens and Hans Vahinger, who seems to have had a direct influence on Stevens. The concept of "fiction," if not the term, and the implied attitudes toward truth and belief that go with it, are familiar to readers of James, Bridgman and many more or less popular writers on semantics in the thirties and the forties. Definition by citing a cloud of witnesses — the kind I have been indulging in — is characteristic of the more theoretical chapters of *The Sense of an Ending.* Kermode's study is yet another reminder that we live in the second great Age of Analogy, which derives indirectly from the first. It is al-

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most de rigeur nowadays for critics to open the discussion of almost anything by citing Augustine or St. Thomas or Dante, or better yet, some forgotten theologian like Joachim of Flora.

Kermode's basic "model," as the behavioral scientists say, for fiction is "apocalypse," which he interprets as prophecy of the end, rather than as revelation in the broad sense. It would be impossible in a brief review to do justice to the variety and ingenuity with which "The End," "Fictions" and "World Without End or Beginning" (titles of the first three chapters) are illustrated by quotation and analogy. There is the simple example of the psychological fiction by which we order the ticking of a clock, with "tick" as "a humble genesis" and "tock as a feeble apocalypse." There is of course St. John, and the millennial prophecies of the early Christian era. There are all the writers already mentioned, and more and "the Greeks," who supply the happy distinctions of "*chronos*" and "*kairos*." Perhaps special mention should be made of St. Thomas' contribution of "*aevum*," the "third order of duration," that between time and eternity, in which the angels have their being. There is also a good deal of talk about "concord-fictions," by which the various trinities of beginning, middle and end are related and harmonized. An analogy is found between theological and literary modes of "concordance" and the "complementarities" of Heisenberg and other modern physicists. Kermode's favorite fictions, it appears, are drawn from theories of time and eternity, or history and prophecy. For two sorts of fiction, Kermode has an aversion: "myth," especially as associated with Northrop Frye, and "spatial form," as defined by Joseph Frank. While sharing Kermode's prejudice against myth-criticism and his feeling that overmuch attention has been given to static pictorial form to the exclusion of the more obvious and inescapable temporal ordering, I do not see why myth and spatial form are not among legitimate fictions by which we order experience both inside and outside works of literature. Kermode does not make sufficiently clear why "regressing to myth" is a Bad Thing, though in one or two asides, he suggests a reason, in the failure to regard myths as fictions, or as I should put it, in the liability of being seduced by the religion of Myth. Myth-critics might reply that Kermode is touched by one of the more fashionable cults of twentieth-century literature and criticism, the religion of Time.

After watching Kermode unfold his expanding universe of analogies, the common reader may ask the inevitable questions: how does Kermode make use of his analogical concepts, and how do they work in practical criticism? A rough if paradoxical answer would be that they work best when they are least in evidence, with the one exception of the brief discussion of Spenser. The relevance of "the *aevum*, the quasi eternal aspect

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of the world," to the Garden of Adonis is obvious, although use of the term adds little to our understanding not covered by the "kind of eternity" inherent in "the generative cycle." On the other hand, the account of Shakespearean tragedy is blurred rather than clarified by use of the same concept. *King Lear*, we are told, "is the tragedy of sempiternity; apocalypse is translated out of time into the *aevum*." And are we helped to an understanding of Macbeth's tragedy by the statement that "the choice of angelic or divine time was his presumption . . ."?

For this reader *The Sense of an Ending* wakes up and becomes a different sort of book with the fourth chapter, "The Modern Apocalypse," when Kermode leaves such direct "translations" behind. The chapter seems to belong almost to another critic, the author of *The Romantic Image*. Kermode makes a clear and convincing distinction between "the traditionalist modernism" that "we associate with Pound and Yeats, Wyndham Lewis and Eliot and Joyce," and the recent "tradition of the New," represented by Sartre, William Burroughs and Robbe-Grillet. As might be expected, the criticism of Yeats is most impressive, particularly of the fictions of his System. Kermode now begins to use language that implies some standard other than a more or less consciously assumed fiction. He speaks with approval of Yeats's distrust of "justice," of the order we impose on the "irreducible" reality: Yeats "understood very well the need for that 'moral element in poetry' which is 'the means whereby' it is 'accepted into the social order and becomes a part of life.' " After illustrating the "triumph" of mere novelty in recent avant-garde novels, Kermode comes out for "the humanly needed order we call form," and insists on the duty of the critic to stand up for it, while not forgetting "the true nature of our fictions." In his interesting analysis of Sartre's *La Nausée*, he characterizes it as a novel that "reflects a philosophy it must, in so far as it possesses novel form, belie."

In other words, as Kermode gets farther away from his theoretical or analogical chapters, he begins to talk in more traditional critical language and in terms of values not to be accounted for by his theory of fiction. Though we may grant that any verbal formulation of experience is fictional, we also must agree that when we speak of "the *humanly needed* order we call form," (my italics) we are speaking of demands and satisfactions anterior in experience and importance to fictional ordering. We are back with Yeats,

> *Where all the ladders start,*
> *In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.*

A theory of fiction, and in particular, a theory of the novel, must recognize its dependence on a theory of value, if only by directly

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acknowledging the need for one. To say this is not to demand that a literary critic should invent a philosophy of value. He might begin with the simplest of recognitions, for example, with the question asked by Wallace Stevens in defending the illusory "peace" created by "order" in poetry: "Isn't a freshening of life a thing of consequence?" Kermode at one point sums up very well the suggested duty of the critic: "The critical issue, given the perpetual assumption of crisis, is no less than the justification of the ideas of order."

**Reuben A. Brower**

## OTHER VOICES

GOING TO JERUSALEM. By Jerome Charyn. Viking Press. $4.95.

THOU WORM JACOB. By Mark Mirsky. Macmillan. $4.95.

WHEN SHE WAS GOOD. By Philip Roth. Random House. $5.95.

IN ORBIT. By Wright Morris. New American Library. $3.95.

THE KNIGHTLY QUEST. By Tennessee Williams. New Directions. $5.50.

THE TIME OF FRIENDSHIP. By Paul Bowles. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $4.95.

The problem of finding a voice and maintaining it must always be the concern of any writer who is serious about his work. In modern literature few first-rate writers have not turned their problems with style and voice into a subject.

This does not mean that a writer is more promising or should be taken seriously because he publicizes himself or lets us share the crises of his craft. Talent refuses to oblige us. But when we turn to any new work of an established novelist, it is his identifiable voice we hear: and we listen for it instinctively in the young. Allowing for all the necessary dependency upon their masters, we await the distinctive word or phrase, the sound of *someone,* his particular intonations, the surprises that go beyond influence and calculation.

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With the younger writers under discussion it seems patronizing to indulge in praise by association, to admire the voices they are imitating (Nabokov, Pynchon, Singer — how often an element of fashion creeps in!). Jerome Charyn's *Going To Jerusalem* adapts Nabokovian devices, swings along with Pynchon-like ingenuity and remains, in spite of the good scenes and good writing, completely anonymous. The hero, Ivan Farkas, is an epileptic, just managing at the age of thirty-one to break from his demonic father, a self-styled admiral who runs a military academy in Brooklyn. The Academy with its tiny soldiers in outmoded costumes is more grotesque and a lot less funny than Munchkinland, and a good place to get out of. The pace is fast, picaresque, as Charyn sets up each scene for the next encounter, but once in motion the novel hardly ever pauses to engage us.

Under orders from the Admiral, Ivan goes on the road with a six-year-old chess prodigy in pursuit of Kortzfleisch, an old German chess champion in his decline. While the chase is obsessive and absurd, it has none of the mystery and seductive terror of the hunt in *Lolita*. With this *donnée*, what can be left to discover:

> ". . . Kortz. He's a dead man," says Ivan, "whatever he did he can't harm anybody now. Not even with his chess playing. . . . Fifteen years ago he might have challenged Botvinnik or Spassy or Tal and gotten away with it. They'd mate him in a moment today. He's a ghost, Papa. You know it."
>
> "I prefer my ghosts to have a little less flesh," the Admiral says squinting. "Somehow I find it difficult to forget that Herr Kortzfleisch was Himmler's deputy. That he is responsible for the deaths of crippled children and sick old men."

In one bad play the chess metaphor is undermined before the first tournament. Charyn's problem is that he wants to construct fantasies; but he depletes them with reality. As the prodigy's suitcase is being packed, we are pretty much told what we'll find in the motels across the country. " 'Papa, I want to say, madness can't be localized. The symptoms are too widespread.' "

The Admiral is chasing his own guilt, of course, in his pursuit of Kortz. With the instincts of a Storm Trooper, he rejects the epileptic son he had wanted to make a superman. He locks his wife in an asylum and speaks of tainted blood: " 'I married a harpy with a history of half-wits and lunatics behind her.' " There is a scene in the South straight out of *The Blacks* — Negro clowns in white masks taunt Ivan who again refuses any guilt. Charyn's concerns are a lot more direct than his modish style will allow, and I can't help feeling that he got wound up in the inventions of a "brilliant comic novel" that would have

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currency. Kortz's final confession is a lingering, beautifully written stop in the action; sadly late in the game, I found that I might have cared.

As a postscript, this from Nabokov's foreword to *The Defense,* which illustrates his way of working into a theme so that it is never an overlay, but is always central and necessary to the feeling of his work:

> My story was difficult to compose, but I greatly enjoyed taking advantage of this or that image and scene to introduce a fatal pattern into Luzhin's life and to endow the description of a garden, a journey, a sequence of humdrum events, with the semblance of a game of skill, and, especially in the final chapters, with that of a regular chess attack demolishing the innermost elements of the poor fellow's sanity.

*Thou Worm Jacob* by Mark Mirsky calls upon the whole Jewish canon from Sholem Aleichem to Malamud, and yet it cannot be put down as merely parochial. As a novel Mirsky's book is really a collection of tales about the dilapidated Blue Hill section of Boston. The apparatus that strings them together is light and acceptable: ten adult males are required in the synagogue for the evening Schul, and so we have their stories. They arrive at the synagogue before sundown only by way of a contrived miracle — zooming above the rush-hour traffic in a junkman's cart. The whimsey of a Chagall flight may be intended, but the scene glares with the mechanical levitations of Disney.

"I've got the whole state of Jewish affairs right between my fingers," Mirsky's narrator says at the outset to let us know he's on top of the situation. At his worst Mirsky can stuff a tale with as many presumably hilarious Yiddish references as a Broadway musical, but most of the time he plays very nicely with the self-pitying tag end of Jewish culture: fables, parables, anecdotes are written with full command of the genre. It's a tribute to Mirsky's real strength that he can entertain us with the comic Jewish mode he's caught up in, and not be dismissed for that accomplishment. That he can do justice to a style is not very interesting, and *Thou Worm Jacob* could easily be self-defeating were it not for two excellent stories.

"The Shammos from Aroostook County" is the history of an old man, Pfeffer, who sells out his life to live in his dreams. Mirsky constructs an interplay between Pfeffer's fantasies (for which he has a genius) and life (for which he has no talent at all) with such grace that all the ethnic trappings recede and we are at last in an environment of real fiction. The range within the story is masterful — a lyric passage in which the old Shammos has an erotic vision of Lilith in the woods of Maine; an instructive narrative voice with a touch of the biblical; the old man's fabrications turned to brilliant monologues; or brutal ex-

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changes which use the comic to enrich the horror, as in this scene in which Pfeffer is exposed by his precocious grandson:

> "What does it mean?" Pfeffer's grandson shouted again, his face red.
> "What?" asked the Shammos.
> "The Hebrew!" Heschele screeched. And he repeated a sentence from the text. Pfeffer was confused. He couldn't even find the place. He shrugged his shoulders. "Conjugate the verb 'to speak'!" Heschele demanded. The Shammos was confounded. "Decline the noun 'father.' " Distraught, Pfeffer cried angrily, "Who's teaching who?"
> "Don't pick your nose," Heschele shot back.
> Pfeffer's hand came down from his nostril, trembling. "You are a great little . . ."
> "Bastard!" Heschele put in. "I am a bastard."
> "I got to go to the bathroom," the Shammos said.

In one other story, "The Master Electrician," Mirsky more than holds his own and never retreats to the easy reference of a Jewish yarn. The story is an open confrontation between passivity and evil, with some of the best descriptions of American vulgarity since Nathanael West. The characters assume allegorical proportions in a violent fantasy that keeps to the eager immorality of our time.

I felt the presence of a persona rather than a personal voice in Philip Roth's *When She Was Good*. As a novelist, he seems to have assumed a role, as though he has devoted himself manfully to the idea that one can still write that recognizable novel about the old moral concerns. Reality becomes Roth's subject matter and immediately sets him at a theoretical distance from his audience. Here is my *novel* — full of life and the world as you know it! And because he is in command of his technique, his characters breathe, dialogues are the real thing — exhausting, repetitive, indiscreet. In the midst of a lovers' quarrel Roth breaks in ingenuously, "Was this Roy? Was this Lucy? Was this them together?" It's "them" all right and Roth seems to avoid control of their endless harangues.

The heroine of *When She Was Good* is obsessed by an inhuman righteousness. Where there is simple human frailty, she will invent sin and mete out punishment. She is thoroughly done (almost researched) as are the weak men who surround her. The family scenes are correctly observed, but in the welter of so much detail I thought of the careful reiterations of the beautiful night-watch in *A Death in the Family*: its sparse verisimilitude is sadly missing in *When She Was Good*. Roth is like a photographer true to some wrongheaded principle, who will neither select from nor crop his work. Reality is never sacrificed to art.

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Wright Morris must be what we term a professional. *In Orbit* is his fourteenth novel. Unlike Roth's loose-jointed work, Morris suffers from a programmatic tightness. *Everything* works as though the novel had risen full-blown from a critical article. Take Charlotte, for example, a sensual faculty wife who dances all by herself to Kid Ory records — how zany can a girl get? But like all of Morris' people she is hemmed in by thematic allusions.

> . . . something in the air makes her hair unruly. Alan says it is the storm. He has an explanation for everything. Charlotte would rather that her hair is unruly because it feels that way, as she does. Just before breakfast, when she combed her bangs, the hair rose from her forehead as if drawn by a magnet. She had called to Alan to come and look. Just that walk across the rug gave him such a charge that she got a shock when he touched her.
> "Enough in the air to burn the lights," he said.
> "Enough what?"
> "Electricity. Someday somebody's going to learn how to use it."
> "I'm using it now," she said, and held the comb to her bangs.

On the next page "Charlotte herself is alive in a way electricity is and it makes her unruly." Later, Alan, who is a heavy user of Chapstick and has yet to index his thesis, says of the cyclone which was bound to strike right down the middle of the book with its heavy symbolism, " 'If we could harness all that power — '. . . . 'Harness! Harness!' she cries. 'You and your harnessing!' "

*In Orbit* is about the invasion of the irrational on our not-too-rational world. Things may happen by chance, Morris suggests, but the world is full of prurient types longing for the next disaster. Into a little college town comes an unmotivated high-school dropout, bewildered but at ease with his ability for violence. The tone is casual — a mugging, a half-hearted rape, a few stab wounds. Like the storm, the boy ricochets off people's lives. It is all predictable; that twister was certain to blow up a lot of thoughty debris.

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"That's a nice twist. . . . You plan to take the twist out of the boy, or out of the wind?"

"Twister weather. Potential killers. . . . Does he plan to take the twist out of the wind? No, he does not. He plans to duck it."

"Only connect the prose and the passion," E. M. Forster enjoins in *Howards End,* suggesting the inherent grandeur, in art and in life, of our own acts of imagination. We feel rightly deprived by Morris who insists on giving us *all* the connections ready-made. How often he ruins his perceptions with ideas from a writer's notebook. The high school dropout is described as he leaves town, ". . . the blob of his face, the eyes gleaming like gems in road signs. Hodler has seen such faces before, crawling from the sea at Anzio, the obligations stripped away." Unrelenting Morris adds, "the choice residing in a twist of the wind."

It's all too contrived — where but in academic novels do we find the owner of an Army-Navy Surplus Store delighted when he is cut down by a phrase which he knows to be lifted from Gertrude Stein? And the picture of Charlotte dancing is studded with English Department wit. Her mood ". . . does not burn with a gem-like flame, but whatever it is that burns loves the fire. . . . Charlotte dances. Alan sits with his book. Is it possible to say he no longer sees the dancer, only the dance?" Yes, it's possible but exasperating. Life, in Wright Morris' novel, how it does imitate art.

Established writers can be arrogant in their reliance upon old tricks. In *The Knightly Quest* (a collection of stories and a novella) Tennessee Williams is consistently uneven. There is something touching and special about his failure because he has always been aware of his genius for creating lives and his difficulty in knowing what to do with them. He is possessed by his material: stories are turned into plays, one-acters are reworked as full-length dramas or as screenplays, as though in search of an alchemy to unite his characters to an elusive artistic intention.

The title novella is full of the shimmering old razzmatazz, as badly faulted as *Camino Real.* And like *Camino Real* it leads Williams to untried and slippery ground. It has wonderful speeches (at his best he often has an actress in mind) and great scenes ready to be staged — scenes betrayed by a lot of high thinking. A comic fable with an espionage plot, *The Knightly Quest* is as purposely simpleminded as a Peter Sellers movie. Gewinner Pearce returns to America from a young gentleman's European tour, nineteenth century in style, to find that a mysterious operation, "The Project," has transformed his home town into a cross between Cape Kennedy and Johnson City, Texas. Directly across the street from the family mansion the Laughing Boy Drive-In has been

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installed, its proprietor so lewd and self-interested that he is held in check only by his own Rotary Club ambitions. The small factory town has not retooled itself with a new morality. The old manners are a sham. Gewinner's instincts are to withdraw on aesthetic grounds, but he is so affronted by his brother who heads "The Project" with the villainy of a robber baron and by his mother, who carries on as a heartless *grande dame,* that he becomes a lonely saboteur. Like all of Williams' dreamers Gewinner Pearce is after something private, romantic. His distaste for "The Project," his hatred of the Laughing Boy Drive-In are almost incidental compared to his solitary quest for a meaningful encounter with beauty or some truth about the human heart — that glittering sentiment that threads its way theatrically through Williams' work.

Here is Gewinner Pearce preparing for his evening of sabotage. He is as well done as any major figure in one of the plays.

> Then Gewinner would prepare to go out. He did not dress warmly. He liked a feeling of chill which made him more conscious of the self-contained life in his body. Chill air about his limbs made them move more lightly, more buoyantly, and so he went out thinly clad. He wore no undergarments. All that he wore on his nocturnal prowlings was a midnight-blue tuxedo made of silk gabardine. Before getting into this garment Gewinner would bathe and anoint himself like a bride, standing among a maze of indirectly lighted mirrors in his shower room. His whole body would be sprayed with pine-scented eau de Cologne and lightly dusted with powder. Gossamer silk were his socks, nylons of the sheerest ply, and his shoes weighed hardly more than a pair of gloves. Crystalline drops cleared his eyes of fatigue, brushes polished the impeccable enamel of his teeth and an astringent solution assured his mouth and throat of an odorless freshness. Often this ritual of preparation would include internal bathing with a syringe, a warm enema followed by a cold one, for Gewinner detested the idea of harboring fecal matter in his lower intestines. He wore a single metal ornament which was a Persian coin, very ancient, that hung on a fine silver chain. He enjoyed the cold feeling of it as it swung pendulumlike across his ribs and bare nipples. It was like carrying a secret, and that was something that Gewinner liked better than almost anything in the world, to have and to keep a secret. He also had the romantic idea that someday, some galactic night, he would find the right person to whom to make a gift of the coin. That person had not been found, never quite, and there was the sad but endurable possibility that the discovery would be postponed forever, but in the meantime the Persian coin was a delicately exciting reminder of the fact that night is a quest.

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It is remarkable, the riches which Williams lavishes on characters he loves, and all the more disappointing that he can not find a story for them. It's not at all surprising that *The Knightly Quest* drifts off into a think-piece on the nature of romantics and the state of the nation, or that Gewinner, for want of any real artistic solution, wipes out "The Project" and escapes in a ship called the Ark of Space headed for "the spot marked X on the chart of time without end."

The short story, "Man Bring This Up The Road" is of interest only because it is a crude outline for the unsuccessful *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, but has no merits of its own. Remembering the nice early story, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," which was turned into *Streetcar,* it seems careless and presumptuous of Williams to publish this sort of scratch-pad effort. We expect even a line drawing (from a master) to be a finished work of art.

The best piece in the collection is "Grand," a reminiscence of his grandmother. It is short, unambitious and amazingly direct:

> I think the keenest regret of my life is one that doesn't concern myself, not even the failure of any work of mine nor the decline of creative energy that I am aware of lately. It is the fact that my grandmother died only a single year before the time when I could have given her some return for all she had given me.

But Tennessee Williams' reputation will hardly rest on his humility, or on this honest miniature in which his feelings are scaled down to the real world.

Reading *The Time of Friendship*, Paul Bowles's new collection of stories, I was aware of a career honest in its aims but only occasionally swinging free of a steady performance. Unlike Tennessee Williams' attempts at unmanageable forms, Bowles sticks with what he can do. Here are the gothic tales with their meaningless violence and seedy Arab settings which repeat the formula established in *The Delicate Prey* seventeen years ago. Here are the macabre Saki endings and the landscapes beautifully tuned to an indefinable melancholy. The stories are always carefully written but, for the most part, they are too self-contained and seldom have anything to match the atmosphere of frenzied desolation that drives through *The Sheltering Sky* to make it Bowles's masterpiece. He is still involved with his ideas of twenty years ago but he has lost his passion for them. The existential experience of *The Sheltering Sky* can never seem dated, but many of the empty exotic scenes in *The Time of Friendship* depend upon a bleak modernity which has worn thin even for Bowles.

This is not true of the story entitled *The Time of Friendship* — a wonderful exploration of the limits of love between a Swiss spinster and

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an Arab boy. Significantly, it gains from its concerns with society. The woman's yearly retreat to the peace of the desert is based on a travel-poster conception of tranquillity that screens out most of the picture. She can never stop teaching, in an enlightened colonial spirit, the little boy whom she grows to love. Polite friendship is the only possible arrangement for these two because she will always give in the wrong way and he will always use her. Her European morality, his devious Arab practicality will make them blind to the other's needs. The Swiss woman is forced to leave the desert because of the Algerian War, the sort of historic occasion which is rare in Bowles. It is not an intrusion upon the tenderness of the story, but a fact which makes *The Time of Friendship* more than a delicate tale. Only the war will set the spinster and the boy free of each other — each to live with his own disappointment and his own possibilities. Of course, Bowles is too intricate to let the war simply enhance his characters with cultural implications: it enters more deeply into the woman's psyche, exposing the nature of her love:

> She saw her own crooked, despairing smile in the dark window-glass beside her face. Maybe Slimane would be among the fortunate ones, an early casualty. "If only death were absolutely certain in wartime," she thought wryly, "the waiting would not be so painful."

In another story, "The Hours After Noon," the shoddy morality of a British matron is played off against a real, though decadent, sensuality of one of the guests at her pension. Again Bowles lets us get hold of some easy associations and then with great artistry proceeds to transform the familiar setup into a real horror for which we must find a fresh response.

A social context was intentionally absent in *The Sheltering Sky*. New York and Paris are shadowy cities and the people have dim, if not mysterious, pasts. The affair between the heroine and the family friend is the one attempt to play against the middle class, but is seen as unimportant, even degrading in comparison to the intensity of loneliness and torture which she shares with her husband. There was time in the novel for us to feel the absence of society and its usual claims, and room for Bowles to create a whole world of loveless alienation, but this is not true of many of the stories, where we are given a shorthand — the desert, the tropics, *kif* — which does not transcribe in any emotional sense into aridity, stagnation or mindless hallucination.

Another splendid story in the collection, "The Frozen Fields," centers on the dreamlike quality of a child trying to piece together the terrible world of adults. It is set on an American farm at Christmas time, almost exotic territory for Bowles, but he knows it thoroughly —

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all the cruelty and pain rooted in the definable past — and I felt once more that the ordinary should be more central to his vision. His voice need only break through a distracting patter of accomplishment to be heard again.

**Maureen Howard**

## MARX AND ANTI-MARX

MARX, ENGELS, AND THE POETS. By Peter Demetz. (Trans. by Jeffrey L. Sammons.) University of Chicago Press. $7.95.

Marx once criticized an historical drama written by his friend Ferdinand Lassalle for "Schillerizing." Lassalle, he said, failed to find those representative elements of his material which could then organically be developed into a rich and profound yet concrete portrayal. Rather than employ a self-effacing method which Marx termed Shakespearean, Lassalle had merely imposed his own, abstract (and mistaken) lessons, in the manner of Schiller's "spokesmen" of ideas.

Peter Demetz of Yale has now Schillerized on the subject of Marx's aesthetics. By imposing mistaken, often seemingly malicious lessons, Demetz manages to reveal little or nothing of the actual conclusions and methods of Marx and Engels. In a word, his scholarship is scandalous, for it omits where it does not distort the salient elements of the material. It won't wash; except, perhaps, among the totally uninformed, and obviously among Cold Warriors for whom it is useful to "destroy" Marxist aesthetics, even at the cost of objective research. Demetz' approach to the subject is indicated by his dismissal not only of Marx's views on the arts but of the entire Hegelian heritage as so much structural claptrap. The dust jacket fails to mention Demetz' having worked for Radio Free Europe, yet it is the outlook of this organization which informs the book.

Demetz comes out for the complete autonomy of the arts and of aesthetics. They have their "own proper spheres"; and to be "legitimate and concrete" must have no relation to "politics." One hesitates to link Demetz' position with that of the New Critics, who seldom displayed such vague rhetorical flourishes with so little effort at proof. However, it does amuse one to note that Demetz' lust for autonomy in aesthetics has itself a political bias. The emergence of a social exegesis of literature, he says, coincides with the mobilization of the French to protect the 1789 Revolution and a "melancholy" awakening of political activity

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among the masses. The rude spread, says Demetz, of political concerns at that time caused even some Russian princesses, taking the air at the spa of Teplitz, to speak of nothing but the war. Politics, he holds, should be in the hands of "political spokesmen of the nation" who alone are in a position to make responsible criticism. Clearly, Demetz' concern for the autonomy of culture indicates a repugnance not for politics but for *democratic* politics. Demetz' solicitude for the autonomy of the arts is a solicitude for their concealed values. Hence he has no use for those who would make the values of art artistically and critically apparent.

When first issued in West Germany in 1959 this book was faulted by the critics for numerous errors of fact. Most of these errors have now been corrected, and the study has been brought up to date, covering recent work in Marxist aesthetics. Superficially, the new passages would seem to indicate that Demetz has moderated his position; but the old views are still there. For instance, he writes: "American criticism should not hesitate to respond to these new developments as productively as it did in the New Criticism to the massive literary sociology of the thirties."

Bias is evident on nearly every page. On the one hand Marx and Engels brought nothing original to aesthetics, on the other hand they departed widely from the aesthetic principles of their astute betters; Demetz has it either way depending on the facts and texts to be

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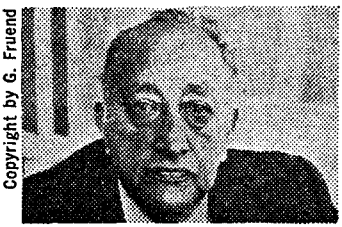
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manipulated. His treatment of the young Engels will serve as an example. He holds that an unoriginal Engels borrowed his opinion of Karl Beck, the poet, from an admired mentor, Karl Gutzkow, and when Gutzkow changed his mind about Beck, Engels followed. Yet, as Demetz himself states, *Engels* first published in Gutzkow's paper a revised opinion of Beck, and Gutzkow then followed suit. Demetz argues similarly that Engels would not have admired Ludwig Börne, had Gutzkow not praised him. Yet the essay in which Gutzkow did so was published a year after Engels' first and enthusiastic reading of Börne in 1838! And although Engels himself praised Börne for "style as well as [for] power and richness of ideas," Demetz dares say that Engels, uninterested in "genuine literary discussions," cared for Börne only as "a political hero"! Let us note that Demetz too praises Börne's style as "flexible, pure, tense, and of unsurpassed strength"; was this purity and strength unrelated to Börne's political energy?

Demetz also cudgels Engels for studying Hegel while moving away from Gutzkow, "the first and the last German writer" who might have taught Engels some "respect for the essence of literature." His proof that Engels lacked respect for the essence of literature? It is a hint by Engels, in an early essay, that he would dare assign to oblivion writings which conduced to a servile mentality. For good measure, Demetz also charges Engels with hypothetical censorship, while passing over, without comment, the good Gutzkow's quoted admission that he had *in fact* censored Engels' contributions to his paper.

Meanwhile Demetz manages to subvert his own theory of cultural autonomy, with a casual remark that French art of the early nineteenth century, "following French foreign policy, had turned to North African and Oriental themes."

He praises a poem by Ferdinand Freiligrath, "To Spain," which portrays admiringly the courage of a reactionary fallen in battle. Such verse, Demetz declares, exhibits autonomy. We learn pages later that the author of the poem, who had been making out on a clerk's wages, was soon thereafter rewarded for his "unpolitical" verses with a life pension from the ruler of Prussia. And Freiligrath himself soon renounced the pension as a political encomium and bribe.

Demetz' silences are always telling. He omits all mention of the poet George Weerth, and of Engels' important essay of 1883 terming him "the first and most significant poet of the German proletariat." Apparently the lifelong warm relations of Weerth with Marx and Engels, the lack of any rupture or misunderstanding which might be exploited or distorted, was enough reason to leave him out of a study of Marx's and Engels' literary views and relations. In light of Demetz' imputation

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to Engels of a censorial bent (not buttressed by any evidence from the mature writings of Engels), one must rebuke especially his failure to mention Marx's powerful attacks on Prussian censorship, which contain a passionate defense of the right of individual expression. In discussing *The German Ideology*, Demetz notes in passing an "unexpected" provision for the relative autonomy of consciousness and therefore of artistic creation, that is, a correspondence of spiritual and material developments in the life process. Yet, in summing up, this "unexpected" matter vanishes entirely. All of this sleight-of-hand is tedious, particularly such remarks as that it was "penetrating" of Heine, converting to religion on his deathbed, to suggest to Marx that he also repent.

Demetz' whole intent is to show that Marx and Engels wished to *moralize* literature. And yet, in the correspondence with Lassalle and Harkness, in Marx's treatment of Eugène Sue, and, indeed, in everything else they had to say on the subject, Marx and Engels are set against such bourgeois-liberal "Schillerizing." The fact is, that Marx and Engels merely sought faithful, powerful realism, and scorned the moralizing author. History, they believed, depicted in its own movement, spoke loudly and without bias of its meaning and directions.

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Still, the work is not wholly futile. If one wishes a *biographical* study of Marx and Engels in their literary activity and interests, this is the one source now available in English. Moreover, the accounts of their relations with George Herwegh, Gutzkow, Börne, Freiligrath and Heine are quite full, and it must be said that the Marxist commentators, by and large, have been in their own way no more unbiased than is Demetz.

A full account in English of the actual aesthetic ideas of Marx and Engels is long overdue. Only one monograph, by Mikhail Lifshitz, considers some of the basic problems. Of course, there are any number of English-language books and articles, pro and con, interpreting the "Marxist" view of art, particularly in the Soviet Union, but all without seriously examining the actual texts of Marx and Engels. Nor do we have an adequate edition of the texts in English. The slim volume issued by International Publishers (1947) is poorly selected, lacks commentary and some of it is badly translated. Demetz, with his tendentious extracts and his manifold omissions, does not make good the lack of texts.

Yet, strangely, American cultural criticism has grown in "Marxist" content since the thirties. One finds our critics and cultural historians generally more than ever aware of the social problems and forces expressed in aesthetic terms, and more aware of the dimension of alienation in art under modern capitalism. Whether this has come about as a refinement of the largely inadequate Marxist views of thirty years ago, or perhaps in spite of the Party periodicals and critics, is a moot question.

Marxist views on painting, for example, are applied in a concrete and subtle way today in America by Leonard Baskin, Milton W. Brown, Oliver Larkin, Harold Rosenberg and Meyer Schapiro, to name a few. Though their use of Marxist perspectives is not wholly consistent with other tools in their approach, their writings do display — with aberrations — a sophistication of understanding which can only be termed "Marxist," of an incisiveness which one did not find in our art criticism until recent years. The situation is similar in other genres of criticism and cultural history.

Anti-Communist polemicists like Demetz, harping upon "autonomy" and the uselessness of Marx, must be at a loss to explain the influence of Marx on critical thought. Marxist aesthetics is not a universal key to artistic phenomena; but it is one key, and an essential one as is increasingly recognized.

**Lee Baxandall**

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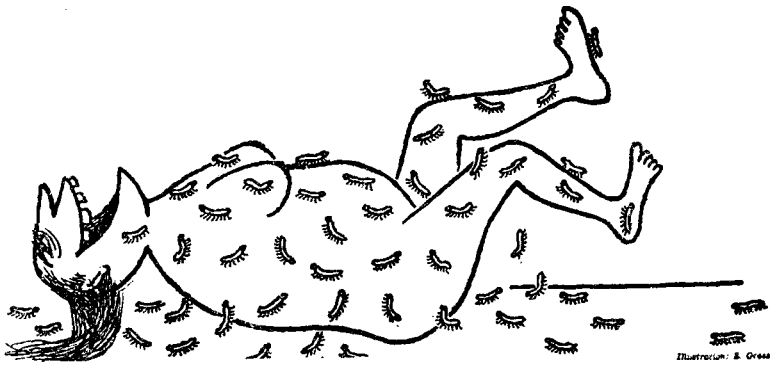

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## LETTERS

### A NO-GOOD UNION

**Sirs:**

I am rather new to the in–fighting of the world of radical politicos, but I am already depressed by reading Irving Howe's endless defenses of his particular brand of coalitionism. I am depressed not because of his pessimism, but rather because of his refusal to cope with what appear to me to be obvious changes in the nature of American politics since the thirties. His recent essay (Fall, 1967) in *PR*, concerning the Welfare State, is so full of nostalgia for the radicalism of the thirties that it is hard to believe that he is interested in, or capable of, shaping a radical critique of political protest for the sixties. To say that we must live within the limits of welfarism is not to say that we must allow ourselves to be trapped by the assumptions of those radical-liberals of the thirties who helped it to grow. Howe's solution is essentially only a hoped-for repeat of the peculiar circumstances of an earlier era.

I see two major obstacles to any resurrection of the coalition of the thirties: 1) the issues around which a radical grouping could possibly coalesce have changed markedly, and 2) the groups formerly available for a radical coalition have themselves changed — particularly the unions. Howe's theory of coalition stands or falls on the crucial assumption that unions should, and will, participate. He lists a few issues on which the unions have joined the radical attack, but he refuses to admit that on most of the issues that really matter to the Negro and the urban and rural poor — that is, to the other members of the potential radical coalition — the labor movement no longer shares common goals. In Howe's terms, the unions have successfully "invaded" the traditional economic and political power structure, while the poor and the Negro have not. The issues that proved so useful in drawing a coalition together in the thirties have been partially solved. These institutional and legal changes did not completely remove the problems that produced the radical coalition of the thirties. However, by offering psychological satisfactions and institutional palliatives, they did reduce the awareness of the extent to which these problems persisted. Since the poor believe that these difficulties still exist, while the labor movement does not, there are no shared goals which will now serve as a basis for coalition. This means that labor has been swallowed up by the mainstream political processes. The unions may not be a part of the "establishment" yet, but most unions no longer care about the issues which serve as the basis for the radical protest of the other members of the coalition. Labor is for a guaranteed income, but so is Milton Friedman, and like him, most unions oppose integration of the Negro into the labor force by means of radical political and economic change.

The pursuit of this fantasy that the unions can play a significant role in a radical coalition would not matter much if, as Howe believes, it were possible to pursue both coalitionist politics and the direct action of protest. In most

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cases, it is not possible. In any society, let alone the small radical community, resources are limited, and choices have to be made. The two aims are strategically incompatible and tactically irreconcilable. This is not to say that both will not continue to play a role in radical circles. They will, but each individual radical must choose how best to allocate his time and efforts. And in arguing for an improbable coalitionism, Howe leaves, by default, some variety of extra-political protest as the only available option for radical change. And this protest tends to be increasingly revolutionary. Yet, certainly the history of radicalism in America, as well as the current political climate, would give scant support for any hope that direct revolutionary action can successfully transform the American system. (Perhaps that same history would also show that coalitionism has not achieved much of lasting significance, but the progressive era and the thirties have left at least a residue of legal and structural changes.) Thus, if Howe's prescription seems implausible and a revolutionary approach is equally inappropriate, we are apparently faced with *no* effective choices.

But if one believes that coalitionism can theoretically be effective, because coalition politics do attempt to seize and wield the traditionally available channels of power in our society, I think we must not allow Howe's particular kind of coalitionism to stand as our only answer to the revolutionaries. The search must be for the kind of coalition that reflects the shared interests of those who are alienated from society. This is obviously difficult, for the real problem in American society is that so few groups realize the extent of their powerlessness. It seems to me that any radical coalition must include those who ordinarily do not have paths of influence to the regular power structure. That leaves out most unions, or at least their leaders, who now hold a rather secure place in the national power structure. In searching for the powerless and the deprived, we must turn to the poor, the Negro, the lower middle-class consumer and the white-collar worker who are exploited by the market economy and the corporate system of private power. The support for the recent Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace in Chicago provides hope that some elements of the labor movement can still play a role in some of the areas of radical politics; but by and large, the labor movement no longer shares the goals of the "dispossessed" groups mentioned here. (For more detailed evidence of the current lack of empathy between the unions and the other members of Howe's coalition, I recommend Paul Jacobs' essay "What Can We Expect from the Union" in *The Radical Papers* — edited by Irving Howe.)

It is true that any coalition can arise only if the powerless elements in American society become aware that they lack any adequate political and economic voice in society. And although the New Left may not have had much success in directly changing national policy, it may have had an indirect impact in helping these elements to realize that they are not really participating in the processes of decision-making in America. The New Left is helping to destroy the economic and political myths which have prevented the consumer and the white-collar worker from seeing his

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own powerlessness. Until the myths of the free market economy and the role of private power are exposed, no new effective coalition can arise. And if they are not exposed, we must continue to rely on old outworn formulas for coalitions — like Mr. Howe's. Indeed, his coalition is based on one other myth which must be destroyed — namely that labor is as powerless as the "poor" and therefore has as much interest in the goals of radical change.

**Brian R. Wright**

**Mr. Howe replies:**

Whatever anyone thinks about my current political views, it seems to me beyond dispute that they are sharply different from those held by people like myself in the thirties. So the charge of nostalgia seems beside the point.

Mr. Wright's questions are interesting, and to answer them fully would require another "interminable" essay. Let me therefore make just a few points:

1) A coalition does not presume an identity of interests; if such an identity were present there would be no need for coalition. That there can be a clash of interest between, say, highly-paid sheet-metal workers and unemployed Negro youth is obvious. At such points, whatever labor-Negro coalition exists may break down or suffer severe strains. But that is no reason why there cannot be sustained cooperation (which also implies tension) in behalf of the many goals that unions


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and Negroes, both employed and unemployed, do share. Both want and need higher minimum wages — which to students of middle-class origin may seem trivial but to laundry and hospital workers seem urgent. Negroes have an interest in slum clearance; unions have an interest in housing construction. If a new medicare plan goes into effect, often in good part as the result of labor pressures, that plan will benefit Negroes directly. There remains, together with areas of conflict, a large overlap of common interest in struggles to expand the benefits of the welfare state.

2) To say that unions have successfully "invaded" the welfare state does not mean that they share equally in the privileges or are in as secure a position as business interests or large segments of the middle class. The welfare state remains a form of capitalism, more humane than previous forms but still unjust; therefore the working class must constantly *struggle* to preserve its gains, let alone extend them. Insofar as it does this, it often contributes to the social advance of minority racial groups. An example is the California grape-pickers strike, which could not have been won without UAW help. And for all their serious inadequacies in domestic affairs and their often appalling views on foreign affairs, the unions remain the single strongest force within U.S. society exerting steady pressure for social legislation and providing the major resources for the election of liberal candidates (most of whom happen to be doves on Vietnam).

3) There are between one and one half and two million Negroes in the U.S. trade unions. These Negro workers benefit directly and substantially from the activities of the unions; here the coalition has approached, though by no means reached, a state of identical interest. In Detroit one-third of the UAW membership is Negro. The recent notable gains won by UAW negotiators will go far toward improving the life of Detroit Negroes — does this strike Mr. Wright and his friends as "token" or insignificant? Still, it did not prevent the riots of last summer? That is quite true; but to grasp its meaning, one would have to study in close detail precisely which segments of the Negro population went into the streets, why they went, etc. With some timidity — since this is a moment when fact cannot compete with rhetoric — I would suggest that the UAW Negro constituency may be doing more in behalf of American Negroes as a whole than the Black Power contingent.

4) I venture, in all friendliness, to wonder how closely Mr. Wright and other students like him have looked into the activities and programs of the union movement. That they know, and rightly condemn, its failure is clear enough. But are they familiar, for example, with the AFL-CIO program for the reconstruction of American cities, surely one of the most radical advanced by any major American institution? Have they calculated the results of the steady campaign the unions conduct for legislation in behalf of medicare, education, improved social benefits?

5) None of this is to deny that there are grave criticisms to be made of the unions. What matters, however, is whether one makes them in a spirit of fraternity or contempt, as a wish for common advance or an expression of middle-class piety. That the coalition forged during the thirties is today

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in shambles is beyond dispute: indeed, the point is developed at length in my essay. As it turns out, however, Mr. Wright is realistic enough to reject the "revolutionary" talk with which certain student and intellectual circles now indulge themselves and to see that radical action in the United States will require a new kind of coalition. Precisely what that will be we cannot now say, and perhaps Mr. Wright and I will disagree as to what it should be. I would only ask him to consider whether any significant force can be built in this country — that is, a force capable of affecting our socio-political choices in the next decade — which does not have at least the partial support of major segments of the labor movement.

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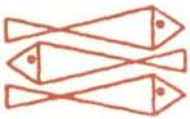

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